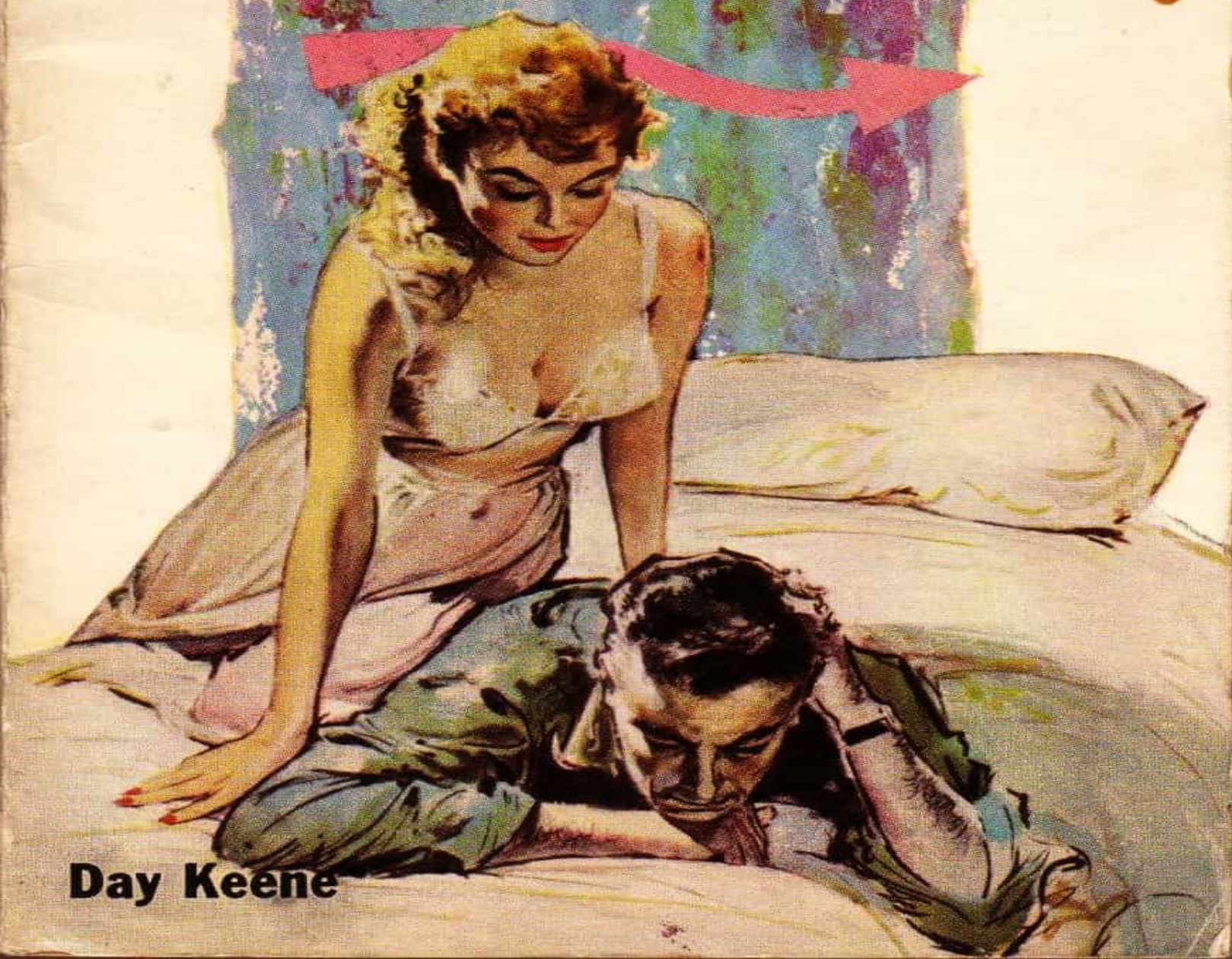




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and love...rode
the waves with
them on their

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passage to Samoa.



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MURDER ON THE SIDE

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Chapter 1

The fare was two dollars and twenty cents. Kelly gave the cab driver five dollars for luck and elbowed his way through the orderly confusion on the pier until he located an assistant purser.

“How long before we sail?” he asked the man.

The officer touched the brim of his cap. “Your guess is as good as mine, sir. But I’d say it will be at least half an hour.”

Kelly felt foolish for having hurried the way he had. A cruise ship seldom sailed on schedule, especially on her maiden voyage. Still, Mr. Harris had said, “If you want to take over Martin’s contract, be at the pier at three sharp.”

He lowered his bag to a stringer. The Line had gone all out to kiss the virginity of the *Kailua* good-by. Both the big white luxury ship and the pier were festooned with flags and flowers and streamers. Despite a cold on-shore wind and a heavy chop, half a dozen water. skiers of both sexes were entertaining the passengers already aboard by risking their necks skimming in and out between the small craft standing in the regular harbor. Up on the boat deck, the ship’s band, playing for a quartet of pseudo-Polynesian dancers, was competing with the whistles of two San Pedro fire boats. Closer by, a group of Hollywood starlets, wearing bright-colored bikinis were pretending to haul on a gilded hawser, while newsreel and TV cameras recorded their ambition and goose pimples for posterity.

It was all very gay and colorful.

A big man in his early thirties, Kelly towered head and shoulders above most of the men on the pier as he looked for and found a telephone booth. He had plenty of time to call Tony and instruct him to crate his gear and air-express it to Samoa. Using another man’s deep-sea diving equipment was like going to bed with his wife. It was frequently convenient but it could be dangerous.

He squeezed his bulk into the booth and started to dial his office, then stopped. At first he thought it was the wind. Then he recognized the sound for what it was. It was a girl screaming. The screams were coming from behind a nearby door marked LADIES.

Kelly opened the door cautiously and looked in. A pretty red-haired girl was standing in front of one of the stalls, struggling with an older man wearing a seaman's cap and blue pea-jacket. His arms were around her. His eyes were closed as if in ecstasy. A blue sea serpent tattooed on the back of his thin right hand rippled and writhed convulsively as the hand clawed at the small of the girl's back.

When the girl saw Kelly she stopped screaming and tried to push the man away from her body. "Well, don't just stand there," she yelled. "Help me."

Kelly spun the man around and hit him. His cap flew from his head, baring sparse gray hair. His back banged into a closed stall door and he slid down the door and lay still, face down on the tile.

Still breathing hard, the girl said, "The dirty old thing." She indicated the open stall. "I just happened to open this door to go to the biffy and he grabbed me."

Kelly kicked the man in the side. "Get up."

The man didn't move. Kelly started to kick him again and held his foot poised in the air. There was a sudden taste of bile in his mouth. He forced his foot to the floor. Whoever the man was, whatever he was doing in the washroom, he hadn't been trying to assault the girl. He'd been clinging to her with the last of his strength.

"What's the matter?" she asked Kelly. "Did you knock him unconscious?"

Kelly exhaled. "Yes, in a way, I guess," he said quietly. He studied the girl's face. "Did you ever see him before?"

She was indignant. "Never in all my life." Her red hair was slightly disordered. She had trouble focusing her eyes and Kelly realized she was a little high. "I told you. There was a bon voyage party at the hotel and I drank too many cocktails. So I had to come in here before I went on the boat. I opened this door and he grabbed me."

Kelly looked from her to the man on the floor. "I see. Was there anyone else in the washroom? I mean, besides the two of you?"

"No."

Kelly squatted beside the motionless man and studied the slim bone object protruding from the back of his blue jacket. "Then you don't know?"

"Don't know what?"

Kelly pointed to the stag handle of the seaman's clasp knife sticking out of the taut blue cloth. "Who stuck this knife in him?"

"You mean he's dead?"

"That's right."

The officer in charge, a Lieutenant Esterbrook of the Harbor Detail, took a note book from his pocket and had to raise his voice to make himself heard above the voices of the technical men and detectives and reporters. Then there were the newspaper photographers and the officers from the *Kailua*.

"Now, if you'll tell me your name again, miss?"

The girl said, "May Ambler."

"You live in the Los Angeles area?"

"No. In Chicago. On the northwest side."

"Your occupation?"

"I told you."

"Tell me again."

May was patient with him. "I'm a PBX operator. For the Precision Ball Bearing Company. And the company had a contest. And I was chosen Miss Ball Bearing of 1957. And the prize was a cruise on the *Kailua*. With all my expenses paid. And two hundred dollars for spending money. And on account of I won, that's why I'm here."

Esterbrook made a few notes in his book. "I see. And how did you happen to come into the washroom?"

May lost patience with him. "I didn't happen to. I came in on purpose. You want I should tell you why?"

A blonde girl reporter and several of the ship's officers laughed. Kelly felt sorry for the detective in a way. Of all the places in the Greater Los Angeles area he could have been shoved off from, the old gray-haired Joe had to pick the ladies' washroom on the pier of an about-to-sail cruise ship.

Esterbrook shook his head. "No. That won't be necessary." He confirmed what he'd written in his book. "Your story is that you just opened the door of the stall and a dying man fell out."

"Only I didn't know he was dying. I thought he was trying to, well, you know what I mean."

"I know."

“So I screamed.” May smiled at Kelly. “Then this nice gentleman came in and pulled him off me and hit him.”

When the medical examiner had finished his preliminary examination he’d covered the body with a small tarp. Lieutenant Esterbrook lifted the canvas from the dead man’s face. “You never saw him before?”

“Never.”

Esterbrook dropped the canvas. “Just one more question, Miss Ambler.”

“Yes?”

“Think carefully. This can be very important. Just before you came in here, did you see anyone, either a man or a woman, come out?”

May shook her head. “No, I didn’t.”

She spoke a trifle too quickly. She was a shade too emphatic. She’s lying, Kelly thought. He wondered why, then figured it out. The cruise meant a lot to the girl. It could be the one big experience in her life. And while she was no mental giant, she knew enough about police procedure to avoid admitting she’d seen anyone leave the washroom. That would make her a material witness and she would be held as such.

Kelly realized that Esterbrook was speaking to him. “Haven’t I seen you around here in town?”

“It’s possible,” Kelly said. “I live here.”

“What’s your name?”

“Matt Kelly.”

“Anything on the big book?”

“No.”

“Where do you come into this?”

Kelly pushed himself away from the wash bowl against which he’d been leaning. “I don’t. I just heard Miss Ambler scream.”

‘And came in here and pulled the guy off and hit him.’

“That’s right.”

“What are you doing on the pier?”

“Getting ready to sail on the *Kailua*.”

“In those clothes?”

Kelly looked at his reflection in the long mirror over the bowls. There was something in what the lieutenant said. His Donegal tweed was expensive but unpressed. There was a smear of oil on one of the collar tabs of his gray gabardine shirt. He needed a shave. He’d just finished the harbor

dive for the insurance company when Mr. Harris had called up. Not expecting the call, he'd put on the first clothes that came to his hand.

"You have something there," he smiled. "If I'd known I was going to get my pictures in the papers, I'd have put on a clean shirt. A T-shirt and my Bermuda shorts."

"A wise guy, eh?"

"Not particularly."

"What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a diver."

"What kind of a diver?"

"Deep-sea."

The detective nodded. "Oh, yes. I place you now. You own that salvage outfit over on the other side of the harbor. Kelly Marine."

"Yeah. That's me."

"And just why are you sailing on the *Kailua*?"

"Because Mr. Harris asked me to."

"Who's Harris?"

"An attorney for the Ryan estate."

One of the detectives said, "The Ryan estate. That's the outfit led by that society girl. The one that's sailing for Samoa to try to salvage a lot of cash and some valuable papers from the captain's safe of that yacht that went down a couple of years ago."

Lieutenant Esterbrook was short with him. "I read the newspapers, too." He tapped Kelly's chest with his finger. "And for your information, mister, a man by the name of Martin, Chuck Martin from San Diego, is the diver for the Ryan crowd."

Kelly lighted a fresh cigarette from the stub of the one he was smoking. "Was the diver?"

"What do you mean, was the diver?"

"Because while you're leaning your weight on me, on account of some damn fool driver jumping the dividing line on the Harbor Freeway, Martin is lying in Central Receiving with two broken legs and a possible concussion."

"How do you know?"

"Mr. Harris called me from the hospital and asked if I wanted to take the job. And when I said I'd have to know more about it than he could tell me over the phone, he asked me to sail at least as far as Honolulu while I

discussed the contractual details with Miss Ryan. If they are satisfactory to me, I go on to Pago Pago. If I don't like the deal, I fly back from Honolulu at the estate's expense. And if you don't believe me, contact Miss Ryan in Lanai Suite 118 on the promenade deck of the *Kailua*. Mr. Harris said he'd call her and tell her I was on my way."

The purser of the ship was among the group of men in the washroom. He consulted the passenger list on his clipboard. "That seems to check, Lieutenant. I have a last minute transfer changing the occupancy of Lanai Suite 119 from a Mr. Charles Martin to a Mr. Matt Kelly."

"Who made it?"

"Miss Sylvia Ryan."

"When?"

"About half an hour before all this mess in here popped up." The purser consulted his watch. "That would be almost two hours ago."

Kelly hadn't realized that so much time had passed. He glanced at Miss Ambler. There were strain lines around her eyes. Her lower lip was quivering. He offered her his cigarette. "Take a puff of this, kid."

She filled her lungs with smoke and then slowly exhaled. "Thank you. You're nice. I like you."

An impatient blast of the ship's whistle filled the room. The first mate came in. "Captain Haines' compliments, sir. He would like to know how much longer this may hold us up."

Esterbrook shook his head. "I haven't the least idea. We haven't even identified the guy."

The mate protested, "Do you realize how much this delay is costing the Line?"

Esterbrook answered hotly, "Do you realize a man has been murdered? As I see it, he was stabbed out on the pier and dragged in here and pushed into one of the stalls in the hope that his body wouldn't be found until after the *Kailua* sailed. I'll call headquarters and ask for instructions. But meanwhile the *Kailua* stays right where she is."

Kelly caught his arm as he started to leave. "Does that hold for Miss Ambler and myself? I mean staying where we are. It's all right with me but I think she's had about all she can take."

"Okay," Esterbrook said. "You can take her aboard. But I'll want to talk to both of you again."

Kelly escorted May across the pier and up the gangplank of the ship. According to the room chart, she and a Miss Janice Hart were assigned to an outside stateroom well forward on the upper deck. Kelly rode up in the elevator with her and took her to her door. May seemed reluctant for him to leave.

"I don't know what I'd have done without you," she said, putting her hand in his.

Kelly made time while her gratitude was fresh. "Perhaps we can have dinner together, then maybe a few drinks."

"I'd like that very much."

Kelly turned to go, then faced her again. "Just one thing. You lied to the lieutenant, didn't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," May insisted. Then she gave herself away, "I—I didn't see anyone. But supposing I did?"

Kelly gave her shoulder a small pat. "Then if I were you, I'd be very careful. Because when the *Kailua* sails, the odds are five to four a killer will be sailing with us. A killer who didn't want that guy found."

The girl sounded as if she were trying to convince herself. "I didn't see anyone, believe me."

"Okay," Kelly said. "I believe you."

Lanai Suite 119 was one deck up. Kelly didn't know either of the two men waiting there. He knew the Ryan girl immediately. Petite and brunette, very pretty in an expensive brittle fashion, she looked exactly like the pictures of her he'd seen on the society pages.

She spoke before he could. "You must be Kelly, the diver who is replacing Mr. Martin."

"That's right."

Without rising from the couch, the girl extended her hand. "Glad to have you aboard. I'm Sylvia Ryan."

Her hand was small and cool. It felt good in Kelly's big one. It was the first time he'd ever held hands with fifty million dollars. The feeling was pure pleasure.

The heiress introduced the men, "Sven Hanson, the former first mate of the Sea Witch. And Hines was father's personal steward."

Kelly shook hands with both men. He knew the older man was either a Limey or an Aussie before he dropped his first h.

Miss Ryan ran her hand through the short, exotically cut hair, which added to her unusual charm. She glanced at the big, blond youth. “Make us a drink, Sven.”

Not—will you make us a drink? Not—please make us a drink. Make one. As if the former first mate were a servant.

The back of Hanson’s neck colored but he did as he was told. Kelly accepted the highball and raised his glass with the others as Miss Ryan proposed a toast.

“To the successful salvage of the Sea Witch.”

As Kelly drank, he decided the girl was a bit of a bitch, albeit a very lovely one. Not that it meant anything to him. If he did take the job there would be nothing in the contract about him having to like her.

All he’d have to do was dive.

Chapter 2

It was a few minutes after seven when the ship finally sailed. Kelly liked the feel of the deck plates under his feet as he shaved and showered in the luxurious bathroom of his suite. It was good to be at sea again. The shave and shower and a clean shirt did wonders for his appearance but there was nothing he could do about his suit. He'd have it pressed in the morning, he decided. Then, if he did come to terms with Miss Ryan, he could buy all the whites he'd need in Honolulu or Pago Pago.

The dining room was aft on the main deck. Kelly asked to see the seating chart. It was as he expected. There were only two lanai suites on board and as the occupant of one he was assumed to be a personage and had been assigned to the captain's table.

It being the first night out, Sylvia Ryan hadn't dressed for dinner. She'd changed her costume and her simple white dress was backless and cut low in front. Sitting at the captain's table, she looked cool and brittle and completely at-ease. The empty chair at her right, he presumed, was for him.

He glanced down at his baggy knees. His unpressed tweeds exuded a faint aroma of fish and mud and oil. Hardly proper for the captain's table. Besides, he'd promised to have dinner with Miss Ambler.

Kelly located May's name on the chart and pressed a bill into the palm of the sea-going maitre d' and turned on the Irish charm. "Look, chum. I don't feel quite up to polishing the brass. Not in this Gaelic formal." He tapped the seating chart. "So how's for shifting me to this table for tonight?"

The maitre d' glanced at the denomination of the bill. "Of course, sir. If you'll follow me."

There were only two people at the table for four, May Ambler and a tall, well-proportioned girl whom Kelly recognized as one of the reporters he'd seen in the washroom on the pier. May introduced her as Janice Hart, her roommate.

Kelly was curious. "What's a sob sister doing on a cruise ship? Don't tell me you're following that thing on the pier?"

The girl shook her blonde head and laughed. “No. My paper has had this cruise booked for a month. I’m well, let’s say, unofficially attached to the same expedition as you are.”

“In what capacity?”

“A reporter.”

Kelly became more interested. “You mean your paper is interested in a salvage job?”

“Just the romantic angle. We don’t care if you people find anything. But whatever the heiress to fifty million dollars does is news—especially when it’s wrapped around an exquisite little bundle of sex like the Ryan girl.”

“Sex?”

“Don’t tell me you didn’t know she eloped with the family chauffeur when she was sixteen?”

“No, I didn’t know.”

“And was married to a phony count at eighteen?”

Kelly felt slightly sick and also a little disloyal. “She seems to get around, doesn’t she?”

“Men, especially,” Janice said cattily. “And my paper thought the story of a beautiful uninhibited twenty-one-year-old heiress accompanying an all-male expedition to the South Seas might make good reading. And that’s why Joe and I are here.”

“Joe?”

Janice pointed to one of the empty chairs. “Joe Phillips, my cameraman. This should be quite a trip for him. He gets seasick when he has to take a picture of the porpoises at Marineland.”

Kelly wasn’t amused. As far as he was concerned, this was a business trip. If the details of the contract were what the scuttlebutt along the waterfront had them, he stood to earn a lot of money. A man didn’t dive to thirty fathoms for peanuts. He asked Miss Hart, “Does Miss Ryan know you’re aboard?”

Janice shrugged. “Not yet. When I checked out of the office this afternoon, my editor was still trying to contact one of the attorneys for the Ryan estate to see if he couldn’t arrange some sort of official standing for us.”

Kelly wished her luck and concentrated on May. The girl had completely recovered from her fright and was looking forward to the cruise.

Even when the conversation turned to the dead man on the pier she was able to treat it lightly.

Kelly wondered if May had told Janice she'd seen someone leave the washroom. He started to ask her and thought better of it. May swore she hadn't seen anyone. And even if she was lying, the fewer people who knew about it, the safer she'd be.

The food was good and there was a lot of it. He ate hungrily. When he'd finished his meal he made a date to meet May in the Outrigger Bar in an hour and rode up in the elevator to keep the briefing appointment he'd made with Hanson and Hines. Both men had been on the yacht when it foundered. They knew the general locale. They'd planned the dive with Martin. They could tell him most of the things he wanted to know before he had his talk with Miss Ryan.

When he reached the promenade deck he remembered that he hadn't completed his phone call to Tony. He went on up to the wireless room to send word to his assistant to crate his diving gear and stand by to air-express it on receipt of the information that Kelly and Ryan were in business.

The wind-swept bridge deck was dark and cold and deserted. No games were being played. As he left the shelter of the stair well and started across the deck, Kelly thought of a minor matter that hadn't occurred to him before. It was logical to assume that the killer, if he was aboard, would have his eye on Kelly, as well as May. Kelly's fingers balled into fists as a man moved away from the wall of the wireless room and walked toward him. When he saw who it was he grinned.

"How come you're aboard?"

"Under protest," Lieutenant Esterbrook said. "When they found they couldn't hold the *Kailua* any longer, the brass decided some sea air would be good for me. Anyway, I have to get depositions from you and Miss Ambler. After all, she did find the guy and you hit him."

"You going all the way?"

"Just to Honolulu." The homicide man folded the message he was holding and put it into his coat pocket. "I'd take yours and Miss Ambler's statements and get off right now if I could."

"How come?"

"The boys have identified the body. At least partially. It seems his name was John Perkins and for the last six months he's been shackled up

with a blonde bag of a waitress in a light housekeeping room on East Fifth."

"She killed him?"

"She claims not. But their neighbors say they had a hell of a fight this morning. Something about him getting out and making some dough, she didn't care how, or she'd blow the whistle on him."

"For what?"

"The neighbors didn't get that part. They wouldn't. But to date, she's the best suspect we have. We haven't turned up a thing to connect him with any of the passengers or the crew of this ship."

Kelly was relieved. "Good. I was just beginning to wonder if I should start looking over my shoulder."

"I see what you mean."

When Kelly came out of the wireless room, Esterbrook was gone. He walked down the flight of stairs to the deck below. It felt good to be out of the wind. Hanson and Hines were waiting in the corridor outside his suite. As Kelly unlocked the door, he apologized for keeping them waiting.

"I had to contact my office," he explained. "And on my way, I met Lieutenant Esterbrook."

"Who's he?" Hanson asked.

"The detective investigating the murder on the pier."

"Oh." Hanson looked for a surface large enough to place the nautical charts and spread them out. Kelly cleared a table for him. Hanson said, "Thanks," then asked, "they find out who killed the guy?"

"Not yet. They have identified him. It seems his name was John Perkins. At least that's the name he was using."

Hines made himself a drink at the portable bar. "Now that should help him a lot. There can't be more than four or five 'undred thousand men by the nyme of John Perkins." He sampled the drink he'd made.

Kelly decided he didn't like the old man. He knew one thing. He wasn't going to depend on a drunk to be a diver's tender. Not with his life depending on getting a steady supply of air.

Hanson laid a twelve by fourteen glossy print of the Sea Witch on top of the chart he'd unrolled and Kelly whistled his appreciation of the trim lines the foundered yacht had. "It sure is a beauty!"

"I know how you feel," Hanson said. "She was a beauty, believe me. I was glad to get off her alive but it almost broke my heart to see her go down."

Kelly studied the picture. "How many hands were lost?"

"Five." Hanson named them. "Mr. Ryan. Jack Bellamy, the captain. Bud Carter, the wireless man. And two Kanakas we picked up in Fiji."

Hines added more whisky to his drink. "I told them we were in for a blow before we put out from Suva. But would they listen to me? No. I was just the steward."

Hanson said, "The old man has a right to be bitter. It almost cost him his life. I knew we were in for weather. Captain Bellamy knew it. But Mr. Ryan said sail."

"You two were the only survivors?"

"That's right."

Kelly asked them if Miss Ryan had been a passenger during any part of the journey.

"As far as Sydney," Hines told him. "Then 'er and er old man 'ad a big fight about something and she flew back to the States from Sydney. 'E wasn't 'er real old man, you see. 'E was 'er stepfather."

"No. I didn't know that," Kelly said. He moved the picture to one side and studied the chart. "Just where did the Witch go down?"

Hanson indicated a small cross within a circle. "Approximately there."

"Approximately?"

"I do have the exact location to the minute."

"You're certain of that?"

"The estate seems to be. A British destroyer, en route to Apia, and a US. Hydrographical ship, getting data for the Geophysical Year, were in the general vicinity and they took a cross fix on our radio signal. Besides that, I know the old man and I were washed ashore less than half an hour after we went into the water."

"Then there is land nearby?"

"A series of small atolls."

"Inhabited?"

Hanson shook his head. "Not the one we were washed up on. It had been inhabited. But the government moved the natives when they were considering it as a test site for the H-bomb. Now there's nothing there but a ship watcher's hut."

Kelly studied the chart. "How far off shore would you say the Sea Witch is lying?"

"Say two miles."

“She isn’t buoyed?”

“No.”

‘In other words, it’s a sweep job.’

“Aren’t most diving jobs?”

“How many fathoms down is her hull?”

“Thirty, according to the chart.”

“What’s the bottom like?”

“I haven’t the least idea.”

‘Was she pretty badly broken up when she sank?’

“She’d taken a beating.”

“How about currents and tides?”

“Look at the chart,” Hines said. “It’s the damnedest water in the seven seas. Currents going every which way. A line squall just over every ’orizon. And the bloody sharks so thick they ’ave to eat off each other.”

Kelly lit a cigarette. “You make it sound very attractive, I must say.”

Hanson was frank with him. “Well, I don’t know what your financial arrangement with Mr. Harris and Miss Ryan is or if you’ve discussed terms. But I know what Martin was going to get. And I wouldn’t go down to the Witch for twice the money. In fact, I wouldn’t be here if the estate hadn’t been decent enough to keep Hines and me on the payroll for the past two years.”

Kelly made himself a drink. “As I understand it, my job is to get into the safe in the captain’s cabin. Do you happen to know how much cash is in it?”

“Plenty,” Hanson said. “Something in the neighborhood of a hundred thousand dollars. But as I understand the deal from remarks that Martin dropped, the Ryan people are more interested in the confidential papers than they are in the money. It has something to do with their not being able to probate Mr. Ryan’s will without them.”

“I see,” Kelly said.

If he took: over the contract he would have to know a lot more about a thousand other details, but he now knew enough to talk business with Miss Ryan. The job seemed to be a nasty one and it could be a long one. The pay would have to be commensurate with the risk. He glanced at his watch. He almost wished he hadn’t made a date with May. But having made it, he would keep it.

“Well, I guess that’s enough for now, boys,” he said. “If I come to terms with Miss Ryan, I’ll want the blueprints of the Witch. I’ll want to know every brace and bulkhead in her. I’ll want all the information both of you can give me, the same information you gave Martin.”

The Outrigger Bar was in the stern of the ship. The shortest route to the bar was through the Polynesian Lounge. Sylvia Ryan was sitting alone at a table near the door. It looked as if she were waiting for him.

“Hi,” she smiled.

Kelly stopped beside her table. “Hi!”

“I missed you at dinner.”

“I’m not dressed for the captain’s table.”

She dismissed the subject. “No matter. We can have our discussion now.” She signed her drink chit. “In my suite. Mr. Harris told you I would discuss the contractual details with you?”

Kelly held her chair for her as she stood up. “Yes, he did. But—”

“Then we’ll discuss them.”

There was one small consolation to her insolence. Two of them, in fact. Rich girls, it seemed, were built about the same as poor ones and Miss Ryan had very pretty buttocks. Kelly admired them as he followed her to her suite. He hoped Miss Ambler would understand. It would seem Sylvia Ryan was a great deal like her late stepfather. She did what she wanted to do when she wanted to do it. And when she said sail—you sailed.

Chapter 3

Kelly sat in the chair Sylvia indicated and continued to admire her as she made two drinks. Her back was as attractive as her front. If Miss Ryan was a bundle of sex wrapped in fifty million dollars he liked the contents even better than the wrapping. All a man could do with money was spend it.

He thanked her for the drink.

The heiress studied him for a moment. "Look. If you take over Martin's contract, we're going to be together for weeks, possibly months. So let's make it Sylvia and Matt." She ran her free hand through her closely cut hair. "And for God's sake forget my money."

"Okay," Kelly said.

She sounded wistful. "I'd like just once to be treated like a normal girl."

"I can understand that."

"While we're on the subject of me, let's get one thing straight." She sat on the sofa opposite Kelly and kept her eyes on his face. "You're big. You're virile looking. I imagine a lot of girdles get too tight whenever you walk into a room! But just so you don't get any wrong ideas, while I'm no angel and I don't pretend to be, whatever you may have or may not have heard about that 'wild Ryan girl,' making love to me is not part of your job."

Kelly was a little shocked. He was also annoyed. "Have I made any passes?"

Sylvia sipped her drink. "You haven't had much time."

"True."

'Shall we get to business?'

Kelly was still annoyed. "I'd really like to."

"You've talked with Sven and Hines?"

"We had a short briefing session. I know about where the yacht-went down and at what depth she's lying."

"And you're still interested in taking over Mr. Martin's contract?"

"Very much so."

Sylvia opened an expensive-looking director's case lying next to her on the sofa and took out a sheaf of papers. Then she put on a pair of reading

glasses and adjusted them to her eyes. They made her look more appealing than ever.

“Well, the financial arrangement the estate made with Mr. Martin was one hundred dollars a day, port back to port, with a minimum of five thousand dollars. Plus all expenses, both personal and those pertaining to the expedition. Plus fifteen per cent of the total amount in cash salvaged from the captain’s safe.”

“How much is in the safe?” Kelly asked.

“Well, the auditors for the estate and Mr. Harris think that, in addition to the business and personal papers we hope to recover, there must have been close to one hundred thousand dollars.”

Kelly emitted a soft whistle. “If it isn’t too personal a question, why was your father carrying so much cash on an around-the-world cruise?”

Sylvia corrected him. “My stepfather. He and my mother were married when I was eight.”

“Your stepfather, then.”

“As I understand it from Mr. Harris, Dad had just concluded a deal for some property he owned in Sydney.”

Fifteen thousand dollars was a lot of money. Still, thirty fathoms was a lot of water. Kelly had no way of knowing if the expedition would be successful. They might not locate the yacht. If they did, she might be lying in such a position that he would be unable to get to the safe. Considering the time elapsed and the type of water in which she’d foundered, the Sea Witch might be scattered all over the bottom and the safe sunk out of sight in sand or mud.

“I’ll tell you what,” he said, finally.

“Yes?”

“You’re empowered to change those terms?”

“I am.”

“Then let’s make it two hundred dollars a day, port to port, with a minimum of ten thousand. Plus twenty per cent of the salvage.”

“In other words, you value your services at twice as much as Mr. Martin did.”

“You could put it that way.”

Sylvia removed her glasses and laid them on the end table. “That’s a lot of money.”

“Thirty fathoms is a lot of water.”

“But do you think you can make a successful dive?”

Kelly smiled. “Technically, absolutely yes. I’ve worked at greater depths. But I haven’t the least idea how successful I’ll be. That’s why I upped the per diem. In my line of business, so many things can happen it is foolish to guarantee anything. Anyway, those are my terms.”

“Take them or leave them?”

“You could put it that way.”

Sylvia returned the papers to the case. “All right. I don’t seem to have much choice. I’ll take them. I imagine there’s a public stenographer on board. I’ll call her in the morning and dictate an agreement and both of us can sign it.”

“Good.”

“Oh; yes. One other thing. When he phoned me, Mr. Harris said you might want an advance.”

Kelly grinned. “Well, I did come away pretty fast. If it’s convenient, you might let me have five hundred for pocket money. And another five hundred or a thousand when we get to Pago Pago.”

Sylvia found her purse and counted out fifteen one-hundred-dollar bills. “You might as well take it all now.

Kelly was impressed. Pretty soft, he thought, to be able to count out hundred-dollar bills as if they were ones. He put the money in his pants pocket. “Thanks. Do you want a receipt?”

Sylvia tossed her purse back on the sofa and picked up their empty glasses. As she crossed the room to the portable bar to make more drinks, she said, “I’ll mention it in the agreement I dictate in the morning. Now does that take care of everything?”

“From the financial angle. There are several other details.”

“Such as?”

“Why the sudden rush to get into the safe of the ship? After all, she’s been on the bottom of the sea for two years.”

Sylvia made the drinks. “That’s just it. The estate is afraid that another storm season may scatter her all over the bottom. It’s one of those now or never things.”

“I see. The papers they hope to recover are valuable to the estate?”

“Very.” The corners of Sylvia’s mouth turned down but she didn’t amplify.

Kelly sampled the drink she'd handed to him. It was practically all whisky. From the moment he'd seen her, until now, the Ryan girl had either been drinking or had had a glass in her hand or in front of her. He wondered why she drank as much as she did. He marveled at the way she held her liquor.

Instead of returning to the sofa, she sat on the arm of his chair. It could have meant anything. As she did it, it didn't mean a thing. Kelly had a feeling the girl was desperately lonely.

"You said there were other things you wanted to know."

Sitting as she was, her skirt drew up taut across her thighs. Kelly found it difficult to keep his mind off them. He hoped she thought it was the whisky that was making him perspire.

"Well, yes. Several," he said. "According to the chart Hanson showed me, your stepfather's yacht went down some distance from any port."

"So I understand."

"So how do we get to the wreck from Pago Pago?"

Sylvia sipped her drink. "As I get the story, Harris has arranged to charter an auxiliary-powered inter-island ketch-rigged sloop." She laughed lightly. "Or maybe it's a sloop-rigged ketch. You could write a book on what I don't know about small boats."

"Who's going to captain this sloop?"

"I imagine Hanson will."

"You think he knows his business?"

"He was first mate of the Sea Witch. And he has his master's paper for anything in sail or steam."

Kelly's respect for Hanson grew. "How about tenders?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Who's going to fish my lines and keep air coming down to me while I'm on the bottom?"

Sylvia wiggled a little closer to him. "I'm afraid, Matt, you're getting too technical for me. Do these men have to be experienced at whatever they do?"

"My life depends on them."

Sylvia said soberly, "Then we must have the best, of course. But that's something you'll have to discuss with Sven. Possibly you can engage men with the necessary experience in Samoa."

“Probably,” Kelly agreed. “Pago Pago has been a Naval base for years. I learned to dive in the Navy.”

The more he saw of Sylvia the better he liked her. She might be a bit of a bitch but she was utterly frank and open in her attitude. There wasn’t an ounce of pretense in her. He decided to level with her. “Oh, and before I forget it, there’s a newspaperwoman aboard.”

“One of those two girls you had dinner with?”

“Yes,?”

“Why should that interest me?”

“She says her paper has assigned her to cover the expedition. She even has a photographer with her.”

Sylvia was indignant. “The nerve. The colossal nerve.” She finished her drink and stood and made herself another. “But why should a newspaper be interested in a salvage expedition?”

“I asked her the same question and she said her paper didn’t give a damn if we salvaged anything. But—you want it straight?”

“Of course.”

“She said her paper is interested in the romantic angle. As she put it, whatever the heiress to fifty million dollars does is news, especially when it’s wrapped around an exquisite little bundle of sex like the Ryan girl.”

Sylvia shuddered as she gulped her whisky. “I see.” She looked at Kelly over her shoulder. “I suppose she told you I eloped with a chauffeur when I was sixteen and was married to a phony count at eighteen?”

‘As a matter of fact she did.’

The corners of Sylvia’s mouth took a downward twist again. In a soft, resigned voice, she repeated, “I see.” Then she wriggled her shoulders and said brightly, “Well, I must try not to disappoint my public. Who knows? I may even get drunk enough to dance the can-can at the captain’s party.”

Kelly was sorry he’d mentioned Janice Hart. He stood up. “Now, look, Miss Ryan—”

“No,” Sylvia stopped him. “Don’t bother to try to console me. And whatever you do, don’t touch me. Remember? I’m a bundle of sex and you’re a man. Who knows? I might rape you and get you expelled from the divers union.” She crossed the room and opened the door of the suite. “And now I think you’d better go.”

“Whatever you say,” Kelly said.

He started through the door and the *Kailua* chose that moment to roll. The motion of the ship and the whisky caused Sylvia to be somewhat unstable and she would have fallen if Kelly hadn't caught her.

Despite what she'd just said, instead of pushing herself away, she stood a moment, content to have his arms around her. Then suddenly, without warning, she stood up on her toes and kissed him. There was no heat or passion in the kiss. There was no emotion whatever. She might have been a pretty little housewife tasting a demonstrator's sample in a supermarket.

"What's that for?" Kelly asked her.

Sylvia's eyes were enigmatic. "I'm not quite certain," she said frankly. "Maybe I'm trying to prove something to myself."

Chapter 4

Kelly started down the long corridor and had the very unpleasant feeling that somebody was watching him. He could sense the presence of an unseen party following his progress with hostile eyes.

He looked over his shoulder. The corridor seemed to be deserted. The door to Sylvia's suite was closed. As far as he could tell, all the doors in this corridor were closed. He shook his head, impatient with himself. He was doing something no man in his profession could afford to do. He was allowing his imagination to impose upon his common sense. Nerves were something a diver had to do without. They were suicide.

Kelly pushed through the door to the deck and walked down it toward the Outrigger Bar to keep his date with May.

Sylvia Ryan might want to play house. He knew May Ambler did. He could tell by the way the red-haired girl had looked at him all through dinner. She was grateful to him for standing by her during the mess on the pier. And grateful girls frequently made good bed companions. For some reason women always wanted to prove their gratitude.

The wind continued to freshen. Only a few passengers were hardy enough to brave it. The cold air felt good on his face. Mid-point to the stern, he stood a moment on the gloomy deck, gripping the rail and studying the *Kailua's* wake. The shore lights had long since disappeared. There was nothing to see but the windblown clouds scudding across the moon and the silver trail of phosphorescence churned up by the ship's twin screws through ever-mounting seas.

The blow came from behind him, with less warning than Sylvia's kiss had. Kelly felt a hard object strike his head behind his ear and the deck exploded in a blur of light and pain. He had a vague sensation of being lifted and he instinctively caught at the rail and gripped it. Then the lifting sensation stopped and his bulk fell heavily to the deck. He felt hands fumble at his body. Then the hands were gone and he could hear the thud of a man's shoes and the click of a girl's high heels.

Her voice whipped thin by the wind, the girl spoke from somewhere above him. "I knew there was a lot of drinking on these cruises but he must have had a head start."

Hands again. Different hands. Pulling him to a sitting position. A man's voice said, "You'd better get inside, mister. Or let me call a steward to help you to your cabin, Why, you're so drunk you might have gone over the rail."

Kelly's head suddenly cleared. He filled his lungs with air as he allowed the man to help him to his feet.

"Did you see the guy?" he demanded.

The man was young, not more than twenty-three or four. The girl with him was younger. From the way they looked at each other and from the corsage on the girl's coat, Kelly deduced they were honeymooners.

The youth slipped his arm protectively around his bride's waist. "What guy?"

Kelly tried to be patient with him. "The guy who slugged me."

"He doesn't seem to be drunk," the girl said.

"I'm not," Kelly assured her.

The youth shook his head. "No. We didn't see anyone."

Kelly looked forward, then aft. Whoever had slugged him and attempted to lift him over the rail had been frightened away by the couple. There were numerous doors along the deck through which they could have entered the lounges or the bar or the card and writing rooms.

"Do you want to call a steward?" the young man asked.

Kelly shook his head and was sorry. The slugger had meant business. "No. Don't bother," he said. "But thanks. I'm glad you came along when you did. This should teach me not to look at the moon."

He went into the men's room in the lounge. There was a lump as big as a walnut back of his right ear but the skin hadn't been broken. Also, his wallet was gone. The man or men who'd sapped him had known how. It had been a strong man. Kelly could still feel the lifting sensation. Whoever had slugged him had been playing for keeps. He would report the incident to one of the ship's officers as soon as he'd talked to May.

The Outrigger Bar was semicircular and very modern, located on the fantail of the ship. Hanson and Hines were drinking at the far end of the semicircle. Closer by, Janice Hart was sitting on a red leather bar stool talking earnestly to a pudgy-faced man in his early forties who looked as if he wished he was still ashore.

There were two empty stools next to Janice and a half-finished drink on the bar in front of one of the stools. Kelly sat on the other stool. "Hi."

Janice introduced the man with her. "Mr. Kelly, this is Joe Phillips. Joe, this is Mr. Kelly. He works down with the fishes."

Instead of shaking hands, Phillips cupped his chin in on palm and rested his elbow on the bar. "Oh, my God."

"Feeling a bit queasy?" Kelly asked him.

Janice was sympathetic. "Poor Joe. He must feel bad. Not even Martinis help. And everyone knows Martinis cure everything."

Kelly beckoned to the bartender. "A Martini for Miss Hart and Mr. Phillips. A Bloody Mary for me. And—"

The cameraman got down from his stool and staggered toward the door. "That tears it. Let me know when we get to Samoa."

Kelly motioned to the half-finished drink. "And whatever the young lady sitting here is drinking."

Janice turned back from watching Phillips to the door. "Oh, how sorry I am for Joe. This is sure going to be a rough trip for him. Where's May?"

Kelly looked at her, puzzled. He pointed to the glass on the bar. "I thought she was sitting here, that she'd gone to the powder room."

"No," Janice said. "I haven't seen the kid since we finished dinner. When I left the dining room I went up to the wireless room to see if my paper had come up with anything new on that affair on the pier. She said she was going to the stateroom to get a wrap before she met you here, in case you wanted to go out on deck. And when neither of you showed up I thought you were taking a walk or showing her the ship or something."

The barman served Kelly's drink. He picked it up and then set it back on the bar, the drink untouched.

"What's the matter?" Janice asked. "Did I say something wrong?"

"I don't know," Kelly answered her. "How much did May tell you about that affair on the pier?"

"Nothing I didn't know. She walked into the biffy and found a body."

Kelly shook his head. "Uh-uh. There's more, I think. She lied when she told the lieutenant she didn't see anyone leave the room."

"She told you that?"

"Not in so many words. It was the way she acted."

"But why should she lie to Esterbrook?"

"I think she was afraid he'd hold her as a material witness and she'd miss the cruise. And I think the same party she saw thinks I saw him too."

Because, just a few minutes ago, out on the dark deck, someone slugged me.”

“You’re joking.”

“No, I mean it. Someone tried to kill me.” Kelly slid off the stool.

“Let’s go take a look in your stateroom.”

“They wouldn’t. They couldn’t.” Janice was almost whispering.

Kelly motioned to Hanson and Hines and the two men left their places at the bar and came over to where he was standing with Janice.

“Aye?” Hines asked.

“You remember the other young lady with whom I had dinner?”

“Very well,” Hanson said. “She was a pretty red haired girl.”

Kelly nodded. “That’s right. Do me a favor, will you? One of you look in the Polynesian Lounge and in the cardroom and the other one ride down to the shopping center on the main deck and find out if she’s there.”

“Sure. Of course,” Hanson said. “There’s trouble of some kind?”

“I don’t know yet,” Kelly said. “I’m afraid so.”

Hines asked, “And if we do find her?”

“Bring her back here to the bar,” Kelly told him. “We’ll meet here in ten minutes.”

They did not speak as they rode down in the elevator and walked down the long passageway that served the stateroom the girls shared on the lower deck. The door of the stateroom was closed. Kelly knocked.

“May!”

When no one answered, he tried the door. It was locked. Janice found her keys in her purse and used one to open the door. There was no sign of disorder but May’s coat was gone from its customary hook.

The newspaperwoman was relieved. “I think you’re making a mountain of a molehill, Matt. She probably just met somebody and went for a walk on deck.”

“I hope so,” Kelly said.

He could feel a fine film of perspiration beading on his face. His stomach was tied in a knot. It became difficult for him to breathe. He’d felt the same way once before when he’d been working at twenty fathoms and had ripped a hole in his diving suit. The resulting loss of air had momentarily threatened to squeeze his entire two hundred pounds up into his helmet.

It was such a simple matter. It was so easy. All a strong man had to do was catch her in the dark part of the deck, drag her into a cabin and lift her body over the rail or push it through a porthole.

Chapter 5

Captain Johnson was adamant. At one o'clock in the morning, with all the working compartments of the ship and all its storage space and public rooms searched thoroughly, with only a fourth of the occupied staterooms still unentered, he insisted that the search be called off until the next day.

Lieutenant Esterbrook asked tartly, "Then you won't turn the ship around and back track?"

Captain Johnson was patient with him. "Even though it might alarm some of the passengers I would turn the ship around and around in a circle if I thought it would do any good. I'd circle all night if need be. But we don't know when she went over-side or if she did. And have you ever tried looking for anybody at night with heavy sea running?"

Esterbrook admitted he hadn't.

"I have," Kelly said. "Twice. And we didn't find anything either time. Has the Coast Guard been notified?"

"They have," Captain Johnson said. "I've been in constant touch with them since Miss Ambler's disappearance was reported to me. And unless we find her aboard ship before dawn, they'll start sweeping the area from the sky as soon as it's light."

Esterbrook admitted defeat.

Captain Johnson looked at Kelly. "You say you didn't recognize the man who slugged you on the promenade deck?"

"No, sir, I didn't. But he was big and he was fast. He'd hit me and had me half over the rail before I knew what was happening."

"Your theory is that he's after you because he thinks you saw him leave the washroom on the pier?"

"If that's why Miss Ambler was killed, it seems a logical deduction."

"But if he was trying to kill you, why did he stop to rob you of the fifteen hundred dollars you say Miss Ryan had just given you as an advance against your contract?"

Kelly's mind felt like a distorted negative. Nothing seemed to make sense. "I haven't the least idea," he said.

Esterbrook said soberly, "It just doesn't jibe, Kelly. Agreeing that the young couple who came along frightened him away and saved your life,

why should he have wasted the time he could have used to lift you over the rail in going through your pockets?”

“I don’t know.”

“Did he take anything but the money?”

“Yes. All of my I.D. cards were in my wallet.”

Esterbrook shook his head. “It beats me. The whole thing beats me.”

“Until morning, gentlemen,” Captain Johnson dismissed them. As Kelly opened the door, he added, “And if I were you, Mr. Kelly—”

“Yes?”

“I’d be very careful.”

“I intend to be,” Kelly assured him.

The wind continued fresh. From a technical point of view the captain’s line of reasoning was sound. With the sea running as it was, turning the ship around would be a futile gesture. If May Ambler had been murdered and her body dropped over-side, the chances were it would never be found.

With Lieutenant Esterbrook beside him, Kelly walked down the stairs to the boat deck. A group of stewards with flashlights were relashing the canvas over the lifeboat they’d just searched. Hanson and Hines were in the searching party. Ever since they’d been forced to report failure to Kelly in the bar, both seamen had been tireless in their search for the missing girl.

His thin nose blue with cold, Hines reported, “That’s the last of the boats. If Miss Ambler is still aboard, I’d say she ’as to be in one of the staterooms as ’asn’t been searched.”

Esterbrook’s voice sounded sour, “You wouldn’t happen to know which one, would you?”

Hines wiped his nose on his sleeve. “There you ’ave me, guv’ner. It’s my opinion she’s gone over-side. And ’er such a pretty little thing.”

Kelly and Esterbrook continued on down the stairs. Some of the younger passengers were still dancing in the two lounges but there were no patrons in the bar. Kelly climbed on a stool and ordered a double rye. “I feel like hell,” Kelly admitted. “I feel it’s partly my fault. I should have told you right at the start that I thought she was holding something back.”

“I wish you had,” Esterbrook said. He leaned one elbow on the bar. “How about you? You sure you didn’t see anyone?”

“I’m positive.”

“All you did was make a phone call.”

“Try to make one.” Kelly sipped his drink. “I don’t suppose there’s anything new on Perkins?”

The officer shook his head. “Nothing important. The boys are still holding the babe he was living with but she can’t or won’t tell them a thing. According to her she has no idea where he came from or what he did for a living or if Perkins was his right name. She claims he just drifted into the café one day and they struck it off right from the start and went to living together.”

“Does she know why he went to the pier?”

“She claims not. But she confirms what their neighbors told us. They had a hell of a fight yesterday morning and she laid it on the line. Either he raised some scratch or she was going to blow the whistle on him.”

“For what?”

“That’s another thing she claims she doesn’t know. She says he was just that sort of a guy, You know, always looking back over his shoulder.”

Kelly said thoughtfully, “That sounds as if he might have come to the pier to try to blackmail somebody.”

Esterbrook was amused. “We figured that out hours ago. Okay. You give us a hand. Who did he come to blackmail? Was it a member of the crew? Or one of over three hundred and fifty passengers? If so, which one?”

Kelly finished his drink and signed his tab. “I see what you mean.” He pushed himself off the stool. “Okay. You do the detecting. I’ll stick to diving.”

He walked through the lounge to the forward foyer and started down the corridor to his suite. Then he changed his mind. He felt depressed and wanted to talk to someone. He went down another flight of stairs and along a passage until he came to the stateroom that May and Janice had shared. When he knocked on the door no one answered for a moment. Then Janice asked, cautiously, “Yes?”

“It’s Matt Kelly,” he told her.

‘Just a minute,’ the girl said.

There was the sound of movement inside the room as if the girl was getting out of bed. In the deep silence of the corridor, Kelly could hear sibilant whispering behind the closed door. When Janice opened it, her blonde hair was tousled. She’d done a hasty repair job on her lips but they still looked smeared. The natural-colored silk shantung robe she’d wrapped around her was her only garment. Where the silk was the tightest both

peaked points of her breasts and the dark aureoles around them were plainly visible.

“Yes?” she asked again.

Kelly had hoped she would invite him in. She didn’t. He said, lamely, “I thought you’d want to know.”

“They’ve found her?”

“No. But the captain’s decided that it’s futile to turn back and circle. And he’s called off the search until daylight.” Standing as he was in the partially opened doorway Kelly could see, reflected in the mirror of the dressing table, the girl’s slim back and the rumpled bed. There was an ash tray on the table beside the bed and unless she’d suddenly taken to smoking cigars, Kelly realized he’d intruded on a very personal matter.

He felt like a fool. “Well, I just thought you’d like to know,” he said.

“You helped search the ship?”

“F’rom the engine room to the bridge deck.”

“But someone must have seen her after she left the bar.”

“I’m afraid someone did.”

“Yes. I see what you mean.” Janice moved the door a trifle toward closing it. “Well, thanks for stopping by. I’ll get back to writing my story. If you hear anything let me know.”

“I will.”

“Good night.”

Janice closed the door and locked it. Kelly walked a few feet down the corridor, then turned back and listened outside the door. Janice and her companion hadn’t wasted any time in getting back to the business he’d interrupted. There was a quick shuffle of feet, the muffled sound of bodies weighting a mattress.

The blonde girl whispered tersely. “Don’t be in such a damn hurry. At least let me take off my robe.”

“The hell with your robe,” the man said.

The man’s voice sounded vaguely familiar. Kelly tried to identify it and couldn’t.

Janice protested, “But I just paid thirty-nine fifty for it. At Magnin’s.”

“I don’t care what you paid. What a time for some fool to knock on the door.”

“What a time,” Janice agreed. Then she cried out in mixed pain and pleasure and the man with her said, “Oh, Jesus,” as if the words were

wrenched from his anguished loins and the only sound from behind the closed door was the rhythmic spat of bare flesh on bare flesh.

Kelly's face felt flushed as he walked back down the corridor to the stairs. He must have been wrong about Janice Hart. He'd been pretty sure she knew her way around but he hadn't figured her for a pushover. And here she was, their first night at sea, seizing on her roommate's mysterious disappearance and absence from her cabin to put out to a chance shipboard pick-up. Or was the man a chance pick-up? There was a lot more to this expedition than had floated to the surface.

Whistling softly to himself and glancing back over his shoulder occasionally, he unlocked the door of his suite. It smelled of cigarettes and whisky and perfume. Kelly opened one of the windows to air it. He was impressed every time he entered the suite. If this was the way rich people lived he hoped he'd be rich some day.

Kelly stripped to the waist, then rummaged through his hastily packed traveling bag. He had plenty of shirts and shorts and skivies but he'd forgotten to put in any pajamas. He'd have to buy some at the ship's store in the morning. There were several things he had to do in the morning. One was to ask Miss Ryan for another advance on his contract. It could be he was too optimistic about the expedition offering financial advantages to him. It still didn't make sense that whoever had slugged him should compromise by robbing him, too.

The wind blowing in through the window he'd opened was cold. Kelly searched his bag again to be sure about the pajamas and was amused at himself. He'd been twenty years old, in the Navy for three years and shacked up with a half-caste babe who worked in a Chinese gift shop at the foot of Bishop Street in Honolulu, before he'd even known that a man was supposed to have a special garment for sleeping. She'd given him a pair of silk pajamas for his birthday. Pajamas still didn't make sense to him. If a man was alone it didn't matter if he did sleep raw. If he was entertaining he preferred to. After the first few preliminary passes his pajamas were usually thrown over a chair or wadded up in a ball on the floor.

He switched out the lamp and walked through the faintly moonlit bedroom into the bathroom without bothering to turn on the light. The scene he'd listened to outside Janice's room was still causing him trouble. That and the mildly breathless feeling engendered by the fact that May Ambler was probably dead and her body was bobbing out on the waves somewhere.

Stripping off his pants, he hung them on the door of the unlighted bathroom and turned to splash cold water on his face. Then he crossed the bedroom of the suite and sat on one of the twin beds. He tensed and the roof of his mouth ached from the sudden constriction in his throat as he realized he wasn't alone. Cat-like, faintly luminous in the moonlight, a pair of eyes were regarding him from the other twin bed. With effort, Kelly forced his lips to move.

"Who's there?"

"It's Sylvia," the girl on the other bed said. "Have they found Miss Ambler yet?"

Kelly's bunched fists relaxed. "Not yet."

Sylvia sounded sincere. "A shame."

Some of the ache and constriction went away. "What are you doing here?" he asked. "What do you want?"

"I think that's obvious," Sylvia said.

Kelly switched on the light. The simple but expensive white dress the Ryan girl had been wearing the last time he'd seen her was thrown over the back of a chair. Her filmy undergarments formed a froth of white silk on the carpet. He moved to the edge of the bed and sat looking down at her.

"Sylvia seemed suddenly shy. "You like me?"

Kelly was honest with her. "Right now I'd like an Eskimo, providing it was female."

"That's not very complimentary."

"It wasn't meant to be."

Kelly studied the girl. She had a beautiful body, youthful, vital, fresh. It was all very lovely and very strange, and somehow very wrong, all a part of the same distorted picture. First there had been the dead man on the pier. Next, someone had tried to kill him and May Ambler had disappeared. Then Janice Hart and her man in her cabin. Now this.

Sylvia persisted. "But you do like me?"

"Very much."

"I'm glad." She met and held his eyes for a long moment, then turned her head sideways on the pillow. "Please."

"Please what?"

"If you want me, take me. But don't make me feel any smaller than I already do."

Kelly refused to be hurried. His hands played over her lush body and his curiosity was active and intimate. “How come? I thought you made it clear earlier in the evening that making love to you wasn’t part of my job.”

Sylvia turned her head back and looked at him. It was hard for her to breathe normally. “That was earlier in the evening.” There was more than passion in her voice. There was fear and thinly veiled hysteria and some other emotion that Kelly couldn’t define. Her lips drew away from her teeth and she sucked in her breath at a particularly intimate caress. “After all, women can change their minds, even if one of them is that wild Ryan girl.” She put one of her small hands on Kelly’s big one. “But of course, if you’d rather I left—”

Kelly kissed the tip of her nose, then her mouth. He laughed softly. “You couldn’t get out of here now if you tried. Do you want me to turn out the light?”

Sylvia kept looking into his eyes. “No. Please. Leave the light on.” She seemed to be trying to prove something to herself. “I know what I’m doing—I hope.”

Chapter 6

TOWARD MORNING Kelly turned out the light. The only sounds in the moonlit room were Sylvia's rhythmic breathing and an occasional jangling of the ship's bells on the bridge. He lay enjoying the vibration of the powerful turbines far below and the swaying sensation as the big cruise ship breasted a particularly heavy swell.

Sylvia's small spent body felt warm and soft in his arms. He should feel content. He didn't. He lay studying the girl's face and his sense of distortion and unreality persisted. Something was wrong. He wished he knew what it was. The last few hours had been beautiful. He'd known the girl time after time, she as eager as he, and now he didn't know her at all.

If Sylvia Ryan was wild, if she was an uninhibited bundle of sex, if she'd eloped with a chauffeur at sixteen and been married to a phony count at eighteen, she'd had very poor teachers to lead her through the intricate maze of physical relations between a man and a woman. She'd been inept and inexperienced, eager to please him, her eyes never leaving his face, like a child playing follow the leader from the first thrust of pain mixed with pleasure to her eventual discovery of close-coupled ecstasy.

"I felt as if I were dying," she had gasped.

Like a child confiding a precious secret. As if it had never happened before.

Kelly continued to look down at her face. There was a single tear on her cheek. He kissed it away. He could really like this girl. In fact he did like her right now. Back of her facade of brittle sophistication she was real and genuine and sweet.

No matter why she'd come to him, she was suddenly very precious to him. He kissed her cheek again and his muscles contracted involuntarily. Sylvia woke up. She gave him a slow smile and her voice was as spent as her body.

"Hi."

"Hi."

"I like you."

"I like you."

“I’m glad.” Sylvia fluttered her lashes against his cheek. “What was it you called that?”

“A butterfly kiss.”

She sighed and snuggled closer. “I feel like a butterfly. And about as useful. I’m sorry, believe me, Matt.”

Kelly put his finger under her chin and lifted her face so he could look into her eyes. “Sorry for what? That you came in here?”

“No. That I wasn’t a better bed partner; that you had to be patient with me.”

Kelly kissed her. “Don’t talk like that. But while we are on the subject, may I ask one question? If you’ve been married twice and there’s been so much talk about you—”

“How come I’m so, well, inexperienced?”

“Yes.”

Sylvia took a deep breath and the hard tips of her breasts, peaked and firm again, scraped lightly across his chest. “If you don’t mind, I’d rather not talk about it. Not right now.”

“All right.”

“Just let me say I knew it could be beautiful. It was. And it’s going to be from now on.”

Kelly was even more puzzled.

Sylvia fitted the soft contour of her slight body to his solid bulk. “Oh, God. If you only knew what this means to me. I—I’m not even ashamed. It was so right.”

“I’m glad.”

Kelly thought for a moment that she was going to cry. Then her small hand moved up between them and she brushed at her eyes.

“Do you want to go back to sleep?”

“Oh, no,” Sylvia breathed softly. “Please no. Not if I have a choice.”

Later, much later, they talked, mostly about Kelly’s childhood. Sylvia seemed reticent to talk about hers, especially about the period after her mother died. Her mother, she said, had been a very beautiful woman, an aspiring actress and a model in one of the better stores in Los Angeles. She remembered her real father only vaguely. Her mother had married Mr. Ryan when Sylvia was eight and when she was ten her mother had died and Mr. Ryan had never married again.

To make conversation, Kelly remarked that Ryan must have been quite a man. Sylvia's reaction surprised him. He'd never heard such intense emotion in one girl's voice.

"I hate him," Sylvia said. "I hated him when he was alive. I hate him even more now."

It was five o'clock in the morning and dawn was beginning to brighten the windows of the suite when she looked at Kelly's wrist watch and decided she'd better go back to her own rooms.

"Look, Matt—"

"Yes?"

"I know I acted cheap. I know you're wondering about a lot of things. But trust me. Believe in me, please. I had a reason for doing what I did tonight. I'm glad I did. You'll never know how glad." She bent and brushed his lips with hers. "There's only one small complication."

"What's that?"

Sylvia's smile turned wry. Some of her dewy sweetness left her. She became the brittle, super-sophisticated society girl of their first meeting. "I'm afraid I'm in love with you."

"That's bad?"

The girl thought 'a moment. "Shouldn't it be?" Then her face brightened. "Anyway, I'm glad it happened." She bent and kissed him again. "And now that I've given you plenty to wonder about, if you don't mind, I'll use your bathroom to make myself look a little less like the kind of a tramp I have been tonight." She tried to keep it light. "Who knows? I may even use the shower."

"Be my guest," Kelly told her.

He took his cigarettes from the night table and lit one. As he lay blowing smoke at the ceiling, he'd never felt so completely satisfied.

In the bathroom, Sylvia stopped running water in the basin and he heard her slide back the glass door of the shower stall. It was then that Kelly heard her cry out. She seemed to be holding back a scream. He swung his feet to the floor and crossed the room.

"What's the matter?"

Unable to utter the words trapped in her mouth, Sylvia raised an arm and pointed.

Kelly walked over to where she was standing and looked where she was pointing. It was small wonder a search of the ship had failed to turn up

May Ambler. They hadn't looked in the right place. Her sightless eyes bulged over the silk scarf knotted in a tight band around her throat. The missing red-haired girl was lying slumped on the floor of the shower stall.

Sylvia lowered her arm and cupped her breasts and started to shudder. The movement jolted a few of the dammed-up words out of her throat. "Oh, my God. She was in here, dead, all the time we—"

Kelly gripped her shoulders and shook her. "Sylvia, get hold of yourself. You've got to get dressed and out of here."

She meekly allowed him to lead her back into the bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed while Kelly attempted to dress her. It was like trying to dress a wax model. Then the full impact of what she'd seen broke through her shock and she threw her head back and screamed.

"She's dead," she screamed. "She's dead. She was there in the bathroom all the time we were making love."

As the rooms filled with her screams, Kelly gave up trying to dress her and snatched his pants from the bathroom door and put them on.

When he returned to the bedroom, Sylvia had stopped screaming and looked at him. Kelly pulled her to her feet. As if she were moving in a dream, she raised her arms when Kelly told her to and allowed him to slip her dress over her head. Then she sat back on the edge of the bed and buried her head in her hands.

Lieutenant Esterbrook, Captain Johnson and the ship's doctor came out of the bathroom.

"Ten hours, eh?" Esterbrook said. He looked at his watch. "That means she was strangled shortly after she left Miss Hart in the Outrigger Bar, or an hour or so before we started to look for her."

He came over to where Kelly was standing. "I suppose you're going to tell us you don't know anything about this one."

Kelly shook his head. "Sorry."

"The girl has been lying in your shower stall all this time and you didn't know it?"

"Yes, I didn't know it."

"Don't you ever use your bathroom?"

"Yes. I used it several times. But after I showered just before dinner I had no occasion to look in the stall."

“Then how did you happen to find the body?”

Sylvia lifted her hands from her face. “He didn’t find her. I did.”

“At five o’clock in the morning?”

“If that’s what time it is.”

The lieutenant started to ask a question and then he thought better of it.

Sylvia had completely recovered her composure. Her smile was thin and brittle. “Don’t bother to spare my feelings, Lieutenant. I’m afraid it’s very obvious what I was doing in here.” She caught at Kelly’s arm and pulled herself up beside him and stood studying his face for a moment.

“This may sound very silly, but you didn’t kill her, did you, Matt?”

“No,” Kelly said. “I didn’t.”

Sylvia ran her fingers through her hair. “So, what happens now?” She looked at Janice Hart. “Do I get arrested for moral turpitude on the high seas and give my palpitating public something really juicy to read about or am I free to go to my own suite?”

Captain Johnson took Esterbrook aside and the two men talked earnestly for a few minutes. Then the captain said, “This places me in a difficult position, Miss Ryan. But a thorough investigation of the affair will have to be made. So—”

As he hesitated, Kelly asked impatiently, “All right. In the meantime, what happens to Miss Ryan and me?”

“That will be up to the proper authorities in Honolulu. But until such time as we dock, I’m going to be obliged to request you and Miss Ryan to remain in your individual suites, under guard.”

Sylvia asked, “You mean we can’t even see each other?”

“I’m afraid that’s exactly what I mean, Miss Ryan.”

She laid her hand on his arm. “I’m sorry, Matt.”

“Yeah,” Kelly said. “So am I.”

Sylvia raised herself to her toes and kissed him. “Until we reach Honolulu.”

She still felt good in his arms. “Until we reach Honolulu.”

After the body was carried out, the crowd in the suite thinned quickly. Janice Hart and her sleepy photographer were among the last to leave.

“Any comment?” the blonde girl asked Kelly.

Kelly shook his head. “None. Except what I told the captain. I didn’t know she was there. And I haven’t the least idea why anyone should put her in my shower stall.”

Janice shook her head. "I mean about you and Miss Ryan."

"No. I've nothing to say on that subject," Kelly said. He felt a sudden fierce desire to protect Sylvia as much as he could. "But if I were you—"

"Yes?"

"I think I'd play down that angle when you send in your story."

Janice was indignant. "Why should I?"

Kelly told her. "Because she at least took off her robe." He fingered the sheer fabric of her garment and went on, "And if she had been wearing one—"

"Yes?"

"I imagine she would have paid more than thirty-nine fifty for it at Magnin's."

The newspaperwoman closed her notebook and put it in the pocket of her robe. "I see," she said, quietly. "You seem to be one of those bastards who listen outside of doors."

"Sometimes it pays," Kelly said. "And this seems to be one of the times."

Chapter 7

THE ANTEROOM off the judge's chambers was small. It smelled like all rooms connected with the law, of stale tobacco and cleaning compound and frustration. The window at which Kelly was standing overlooked the civic center. The center was a spacious, gracious park, containing the federal building where he was standing, the territorial capitol, the city hall, the health building, the archives and armory buildings and a host of other imposing quasi-public and private structures concerned with federal and local matters. Kelly wondered what would happen to some of them and what they would be used for if and when Hawaii was granted its long overdue statehood.

Behind him, Hanson asked, "Thinking of some thing?"

Kelly turned and sat on the sill. "No. Trying not to think." He nodded at the closed door leading into the judge's chambers. "I wish they'd make up their minds in there."

Hines was sitting in a straight-backed chair tilted against the wall, with the brim of his seaman's cap pulled down over his eyes. He pushed the cap back so he could see. "You wish they'd make up their minds? 'Ow about me and Sven? After all, the dead girl was found in your bloody shower stall. All we did to get connected was wait outside the door of your diggin's."

Hanson paced the room. "It's a mess. The expedition's been jinxed since it started. I didn't want to sign on in the first place."

Hines pushed his cap back over his eyes again. "Oh, I don't know. We won't find a cushier job and you can lay to that. It's Kelly what has to dive."

"If," Kelly said sourly, "I still have a job."

Hanson smiled thinly. "I wouldn't worry about that if I were you. You seem to have been doing okay in the private relations department when the dead babe popped up in your bathroom. I've known Miss Ryan for three years and she's always treated me like dirt. You heard her the day we sailed. Make a drink. Close the door. Open the window. Kiss my butt. But make sure I've got my skirt on. Then you come along and she peels everything off and lays you the first night out."

Kelly couldn't think of anything to say.

Hines was optimistic. "Well, if anyone can fix things for all of us, Mr. Harris can. You must admit one thing about the Ryan crowd. When you're working for them, you have a lot of scratch back of you." He appealed to Hanson. "Toe the mark. How many firms have you worked for would fly a high-priced lawyer all the way from Los Angeles to Hawaii to get us out of a tight spot like the one we're in."

Kelly made a pushing motion with his hand. "Neither of you have anything to worry about. She could have been put into my shower stall at any time—just before you showed up for the briefing or any time after that until one o'clock in the morning."

The door opened and Lieutenant Esterbrook came out of the adjoining room. He looked a little unhappy. "Okay," he told Hanson and Hines. "You two have been cleared. You can go back to the ship."

Neither man wasted any time in leaving.

"How about me?" Kelly asked.

Esterbrook bit the end from a cigar. "You? You seem to be one of those guys who can fall into a crapper and come out smelling of Arpege perfume. Don't think you're completely off the hook. You're not. But even I don't think you killed the Ambler girl. So I went along when the Ryan people offered to post sufficient cash bail to guarantee that you'll be brought back from Samoa whenever the State of California is ready to proceed against Jane or John Doe for the murder of John Perkins."

Kelly let out a sigh of relief. "Have you found out anything more about him?"

"Nothing," Esterbrook said. "He isn't in our books and Washington doesn't have any more on him than we do. No one has ever heard of the guy. He seems to have been born randy and ready to go the day he showed up in L.A. and shacked up with that blonde waitress."

Kelly straightened the knot in his tie. "Then I'm free to go back to the *Kailua*?"

"Any time. But we'd better wait for Mr. Harris downstairs. He wants to talk to you."

"What about Miss Ryan?" asked Kelly.

"She went back to the ship an hour ago. All the judge wanted from her was her testimony as to where and when she found the body."

Janice Hart was with Joe Phillips, her cameraman, in the foyer of the federal building. The pudgy photographer stayed where he was but the blonde girl crossed to where Kelly and Esterbrook stood waiting for Mr. Harris.

“Hi, Matt,” Janice said.

Kelly looked at her coldly. “Hello.”

“Why the ice?” Janice asked him. She crossed her heart. “Honor bright. You had a very telling argument. And in the story I wrote, Miss Ryan was wearing two pairs of ski pants and a fur parka when she found the body. You can ask the lieutenant.”

Esterbrook looked at her and asked, “I thought the story in the paper Mr. Harris brought with him was pretty watered down, so what’s this telling argument business between you and Kelly?”

Janice winked at Kelly. “That’s just it. It’s between us.” She held out her hand. “Still friends?”

Kelly took her hand. “Still friends. I didn’t really mean to pop off the way I did. It was, well, shall we say, due to the circumstances.”

“How well I know,” Janice laughed. “And it’s good that we’re friends again. Because I’m afraid we’re going to be together for some weeks to come. You see, Joe and I were just talking to Mr. Harris and he’s finally agreed to give us official permission to tag along and immortalize you when you rise from the deep with the strong box of the Sea Witch clasped in your manly arms.”

“How come?” Kelly asked. “I mean that he gave you permission?”

Janice shrugged. “Well, you must admit the expedition hasn’t had a very good press so far and big corporations are chary of that sort of thing.”

“That I know.”

“So, in Mr. Harris’ own words,” the blonde girl mimicked a precise business man, “After due deliberation and a great deal of consultation, we have decided to respect your paper’s request for a semi-official standing for you and your photographer. For two reasons. One, we would like an accurate filmed record of the expedition for our files. Two, we feel that by cooperating fully with the press the actual filmed record of the recovery of Mr. Ryan’s personal papers will help to offset any unfavorable publicity brought about by the estate’s involvement with the death of the seaman on the pier and that of the unfortunate Miss Ambler.”

“I’ll be damned,” Esterbrook said. “That’s just the way he talks.”

“Shh,” Kelly said. “Here he comes.”

The wharf at the foot of Bishop Street was almost a duplicate of the scene on the pier in Los Angeles five days earlier. The gangplank and the main foyer and the decks of the *Kailua* swarmed with returning passengers, loaded down with purchases they’d made ashore, most of them wearing colorful leis. There was music and sunshine and flowers.

Kelly watched the cab move out of sight. The back of his neck felt flushed. Outside of signing the contract, which he could have done in the federal building, his conversation with Mr. Harris boiled down to a warning to keep his sticky fingers to himself and turn over whatever he found intact. That and the fact that he was working for the estate.

He ground out the cigarette he was smoking and pushed his way through the crowd to the gangplank. Two of the stewards touched the brims of their caps to him but none of the passengers even turned their heads as he passed. The murders had nothing to do with them. Murder only happened to somebody else, somebody in the next street, the next house or the next room.

Kelly rode up to the promenade deck and walked down the corridor. Stopping at Sylvia’s suite, he knocked at the door. When she opened the door he started to take her in his arms and froze. Instead of the ecstatic reception he’d pictured, she treated him as if she’d never seen him before. Her face expressionless, she said, “Yes?”

“What’s the idea?” Kelly asked her.

“The idea?”

It was suddenly difficult for Kelly to breathe. His mind felt as if it were dividing, physically. He felt used. For some reason known only to herself, Sylvia had given herself to him. And now that she had what she wanted, she didn’t know him any more.

He said stiffly, “But I thought—”

“Perhaps so,” Sylvia said without emotion. “But you shouldn’t have,” and closed the door in his face.

Kelly lifted his clenched fist to hammer on the door. Then he relaxed and walked out on deck to breathe in some fresh sea air. He was damned if he’d make any more of a fool of himself than he had. It was very evident that the little rich bitch didn’t want to know him now that she put her pants

back on. So the hell with her. He had more important things to worry about. It was a hundred-to-one cinch that the killer was still aboard.

Chapter 8

THE LATE AFTERNOON SUN was hot. The air was thin and still and there was a breathless quality to it. The line of green cliffs gliding by and the tangle of green jungle creeping down to the water's edge before rapidly falling behind created an eerie illusion that the big white steamer was standing still and the land was moving.

The rail, where Kelly was standing, was comparatively free of passengers. Most of them were on the lower decks or milling around in the main foyer, eager to be among the first ashore when the *Kailua* dropped anchor in the land-locked harbor formed by the sunken crater of the extinct volcano that once had towered above the intersection of the one hundred and seventy-first meridian and the fourteenth parallel.

Kelly wiped sweat from his face and liked it. It was good to be wearing a white cotton suit again. It was good to be back in the tropics.

Janice joined him at the rail. "My, don't we look nice."

Kelly grinned sideways at her. "Thanks. It's just a little thing I picked up in the ship's store. That Donegal tweed of mine was getting a trifle ripe."

Janice leaned beside him. "You know something, Matt? This is the first time I've ever been in the islands, But there's something about them that gets you."

Kelly leaned back on the rail and watched the shore line glide by. "I was just thinking the same thing."

He liked Janice. Since they'd left Honolulu he'd grown to like her very much. From what he'd heard outside the door of her stateroom and judging from the perpetual purple shadows under her eyes, she was combining her newspaper assignment with a flaming shipboard romance. But she was being a lady about it. She might be a little mink in the privacy of her boudoir but she didn't lollygag all over the ship with the male part of her affair. Kelly wondered who he was.

Janice laid her hand on his arm. "May I say something personal, Matt?"

Kelly turned to look at her. "Of course."

"Don't be too hard on the kid. I don't know what it's all about and I haven't been able to get her to talk. She just sits there in her suite and

broods. She's scared to death of something. I-can see it in her eyes."

Kelly looked back at the shore line. "Meaning Miss Sylvia Ryan?"

"Who else?"

"I'd rather not discuss it."

Janice said soberly, "That's up to you. It's your problem and hers. But, Matt, I tell you there's more to it than meets the eye. Even half-naked and embarrassed before a crowd of strangers, she was the happiest girl I ever saw that night when she kissed you after the excitement was over. Now something or somebody is putting her through hell."

Kelly was stubborn and repeated, "I'd rather not discuss it."

"Men," Janice said, dryly. The way she did say it reminded Kelly of Sylvia. But that was nothing new. Everything reminded him of Sylvia. The girl beside him said brightly, "And speaking of the species, I've got to see about one."

Kelly turned and faced her. "Don't you mean you've got to kiss one good-by?"

Janice's smile was enigmatic. "Could be." She patted his cheek. "Poor Matt. Still wondering, aren't you? It's a shame you couldn't see through my door."

Kelly watched her cross the deck, then glanced at the windows of Sylvia's suite. She'd really taken him for a boat ride. There was no mistake about that. For one night she'd been fever and fire, insatiable, demanding, an eager and fast-learning pupil. Now she made a point of never being alone with him. The virgin who wasn't a virgin had crawled back into her alcoholic niche.

The next few weeks should be interesting. From the description Hanson gave of the sloop that was to carry them on the next leg of the trip, Sylvia and Janice would have to share one cabin, while he and the native crew bunked in a tiny fo'castle in the hold or slung their hammocks on deck when the weather permitted.

It could be a rough, tough, dangerous voyage. He knew why he was going. He had two very good reasons; two hundred dollars a day and twenty per cent of the salvage. Both Hanson and Hines were good seamen. They were working for a salary. Janice and her cameraman were on assignment. But why Sylvia should risk her pretty little hide on a crowded, probably stinking, sixty-foot inter-island sloop was beyond him. There didn't seem to be anything that important aboard the Witch.

As the ship changed course and headed for the passage leading into the harbor, Kelly crossed the deck to go below to supervise the unloading of Chuck Martin's diving equipment. Dressed to go ashore and accompanied by a uniformed steward who was carrying her bags and jewel case, Sylvia was waiting for the elevator.

Her smile was pleasant but casual. "Good afternoon, Matt: We're a little behind schedule, aren't we?"

Kelly kept his tone as casual as hers. "About two hours, I think."

As they rode down in the elevator, Kelly studied the girl's face. There was something vaguely different about it. Kelly finally realized what it was. She'd masked it cleverly with a heavy coating of make-up but it failed to hide completely the fact that she had a black eye.

"What happened to your eye?" he asked.

Sylvia shrugged. "Believe it or not, I ran into a door."

The room steward laughed politely. Kelly didn't pursue the subject. He'd gone as far as his pride would allow.

By the time he'd made his way forward and down a series of stairwells to the hold, Hanson and Hines were on the job and had the crates broken out and waiting near an open door. The longer Kelly knew them, the better he liked them. Hines was something of a lush but an able seaman. Hanson was young and impetuous but he also knew his business. And for all his wild talk, he was bucking for a permanent job with the Ryan interests.

They were in a narrow passage now and the green tangle of jungle crept down so close to the ship that Kelly was sure he could reach out and touch shore. During his two hitches in the Navy he'd never been stationed in Samoa but the Pago Pago harbor was all he'd heard about it. The water was incredibly blue. The shore installations were impressive. The settlement itself was picturesque. And overlooking it all, a technicolor, widescreen vistavision mountain reached up behind the town, piercing the clouds to form a screen for the setting sun.

"Pretty, ain't she?" Hines asked. "The Rainmaker, they calls it. And when it rains out 'ere, it rains."

Kelly admired the mountain. "I know."

The three men went ashore with the crates and Hanson left Hines to arrange for their transfer while he and Kelly went in search of the sloop, the *Sally B*.

Kelly wasn't as impressed with the town as he had been with the harbor. It was a typical tropical cruise-ship. waterfront, with a lush charm of its own but with the inevitable stink of copra and the stench of rotted vegetation and the animal smell of shouting native peddlers, male and female, eager to sell their tapa mats and kava bowls and factory-made lava lavas to gullible cruise-ship passengers. The whole scene was further complicated by the two United States destroyers lying off-shore, whose boisterous swarms of men, as all youths will, were running true to form by evincing more interest in what was under the giggling native girls' lava lavas than what was visible to their roving eyes.

"You ever made Pago Pago before?" Hanson asked him.

Kelly shook his head. "No. This is the first time for me."

"Yeah. I remember now." Hanson turned to admire the slim back of a native girl. She had a cute little twitch. "Not bad, eh?"

"Not bad."

Hanson mopped his face with his sleeve and walked on. "During the war it was rough. Too many sailors and gyrenes, all with one thing on their minds. But the last time I was here things were almost back to normal. Two bucks under a tree."

"How about the navy brass?"

Hanson shrugged. "They try. But you can't put a tree out of bounds. Not with all the trees there are in Samoa."

They had to stop several times to ask questions. No one along the waterfront, at least no one they questioned, had ever heard of the *Sally B*. It was a native policeman who finally gave them directions. They came to the sloop shortly before sunset lying alongside of the rotting wooden jetty of a defunct inter-island trading firm on the far side of the harbor.

Kelly and Hanson examined her thoroughly. The sloop was far from new. She'd seen years of inter-island service but she was sturdily built and broad-beamed and she didn't look as if she would roll too much. Her deck space was ample. Her power winch was adequate and in good condition. Her mast was sound. Canvas and diesel were new. Hanson took an ice pick from a sheath on his belt and probed for dry rot but didn't find any. Her paint was fresh. From what they could see of her bottom in the waning light it looked like it had been recently scraped and copper painted. The only really bad feature about her was the smell. At one time she probably carried a lot of copra and the stench of the dried cocoanut meat lingered on.

When they had completed their inspection, Hanson asked, "Well, what do you think of her, Kelly?"

Kelly wasn't too impressed. Still, all things considered, the sloop would make a good diver's tender. He had worked from worse. "She's all right, I guess. You know more about small boats than I do."

Hanson sat on a hatch and jabbed the wood with his pick. "A regular goddamn circus, that's what it's going to be. I couldn't believe my ears when Mr. Harris told me he'd given Miss Hart and cameraman permission to tag along." He brightened. "She's a cute trick, though. And you can never tell out here in the islands. That big old yellow moon and the lap of the waves on the beach give some women the damndest ideas."

Night had fallen while they were talking. Kelly lighted a cigarette and the match flame was a small flare in the darkness. "Well, I suppose we'd better get back to town. There's nothing we can do here till morning."

Hanson stood up and took off his coat. "Listen to the man. Your work doesn't start for another week. But if we're going to sail this tub out of here within the next two or three days, I'm going to be busy from now until then. She'll have to be provisioned There's the diving equipment: and the sweeps to load and a crew to hire. And a hundred and one other things to do before she's ship-shape." He found a pair of oil lamps in the cabin and lighted them. "But the first thing I'm going to do is start her diesel and let it run a few hours so I can hear how she sounds. I'm not going to head out for where we're heading and have to depend on sail. I've been there."

"How about bunking?" Kelly asked him. "F mean tonight."

Hanson rolled up his sleeves, then lifted off the cover of the engine hatch. "That's up to you. You can bunk here or on the ship. She doesn't sail until tomorrow afternoon. Why?"

"I just wondered," Kelly said. "In that case I may be back, I may not. Right now, I'm going into town and look up the express office to find out if my own equipment has arrived."

"What's the matter with Martin's gear?"

"Nothing," Kelly said. "But I'll feel better using my own. And I'll want to spend two or three days checking that. You ever worked in a hundred and eighty feet of water?"

Hanson had started the diesel and had to yell to make himself heard above the noise. "Yeah, I see what you mean," he grinned. "You go ahead

and check. There's nothing you can do here right now. Besides, Hines should be along any minute."

Kelly walked back the way they'd come. It didn't take him as long this time. He liked the feel of the night on his face. It was like soft black velvet. The tall palms and the sea and harbor seemed to absorb all sound. Seemingly, most of the passengers had returned to the *Kailua* and the lights shining through the portholes of the three ships lying in the harbor made them look like painted ships on a colored picture postcard.

He'd just passed a small combination café and waterfront hotel catering to merchant seamen and was looking for someone whom he could ask directions of when he heard a soft padding of feet behind him and realized he was being followed. Kelly stopped beside the bole of a palm tree and waited.

A bare-footed, eight-year-old boy who looked like he might be part Chinese materialized out of the night and stood regarding him.

"You from *Kailua*?" he asked.

"Yes," Kelly told him. "I am."

"What name?"

"Kelly."

The boy pointed to the doorway of the unsavory looking hotel Kelly had just passed. "Lady say to tell you she wait in Room Seven. Up on second floor. In front."

Kelly looked at the lighted second-floor window. When he looked back the boy was gone, blending back into the night out of which he'd appeared. Kelly stood undecided a moment, then walked back down the street and turned into the doorway of the hotel. It was hot in the small café. Several merchant seamen were drinking at a small bar presided over by a half-caste barman who looked as if he might be the father of the boy who'd stopped him on the street. The men glanced up when he entered, then went back to their talk.

A narrow flight of stairs against one wall of the room led up to the second floor. Kelly hesitated, then climbed, the stairs creaking under his weight. The air in the upper hall was still and hot and heavy. It smelled of fried fish, stale beer and Lysol. The only illumination came from a naked twenty-five-watt bulb dangling from the end of a long green cord. As the boy had said, Room Seven was in front, at the end of a short hall.

Kelly rapped softly on the door and the girl in the room called, "Come in."

Kelly walked in and closed the door behind him. He stood with his back to it. With the age-veined green shade in the single window snugged securely to keep out the least suspicion of a breeze, it was hotter here than in the café or hall. The only furnishings were a sway-backed double bed, a small table and a chair. Her eyes slitted and sullen, a lighted cigarette dangling from her lips, Sylvia was sitting slouched in the chair by the table with a bottle of whisky in front of her. Her dress was molded to her body with perspiration. The heat had melted and streaked her make-up and her black eye was plainly visible. Combined with the smoke curling up from the cigarette, it made her look evil and wanton. Judging from her appearance, she'd been drinking steadily ever since she'd come ashore.

Kelly was a little shocked. He waited for her to speak. When she didn't, he left the door and sat on the edge of the old-fashioned brass bed. The springs squeaked suggestively under his weight. "Okay, I'll bite," he said. "What's this all about? Why the cloak and dagger routine?"

Sylvia ignored the question. "How much," she asked, unsmiling, "will you take to call this whole thing off and take the next plane or boat back to the States?"

He wiped sweat from his face with the back of one hand "You mean, not go through with my contract?"

"Yes."

"You don't want me to dive?"

"No."

"But what would you do for a diver?"

She was deliberately insulting. "Divers are a dime a dozen. If I can't find one here, I'll have one flown out from the States or from Honolulu." She took her checkbook from her purse and uncapped her fountain pen. "How much do you want to tear up your contract? You name the figure."

Kelly had never been quite so angry. He'd had girls give him the brush, just as any guy did. But Sylvia Ryan was the first girl he'd ever known who'd asked him to name his own price to stay away from her. He gripped the edge of the thin mattress with both hands to keep from blacking her other eye. "You don't have 'enough money.'"

Sylvia slopped whisky into the water glass beside the bottle. "I was afraid you'd say that."

Kelly pointed out, “Besides, I’m not working for you. I’m under contract to the Ryan estate. Mr. Harris made that quite plain in Honolulu.”

“He would.” Sylvia gulped the drink she’d poured and returned her checkbook to her purse. “All right. I can’t buy you off. But I want one thing understood.”

“What’s that?”

“What happened in your suite the night May Ambler was killed was a mistake.”

Kelly’s anger continued to grow. “I’m beginning to realize that.”

“” don’t want it to happen again.”

“It won’t,” Kelly assured her. Sylvia refused to meet his eyes. “For the next few weeks, possibly a month, even longer, we’re going to be cooped up on a small boat together. We’ll be living in very close contact. And under those conditions, especially if a man and girl have been intimate, it’s sometimes difficult for them to act sensibly.” She got to her feet and he saw that she was very drunk. Her voice was suddenly shrill. “And I want you to leave me alone. Do you understand? I don’t want you to as much as look at me or touch me. You know how I mean.”

Sweat trickled into Kelly’s eyes. It and his anger almost blinded him as he stood up and faced her. “All right. You’ve had your say. Now you listen to me. I didn’t ask you to come to my suite. You were in my bed waiting for me. You wanted what happened to happen. ‘Believe me, trust me,’ you begged. And I did. I paced that damned suite for four days, walking on cloud nine. Maybe this is it, I told myself. Maybe this is the girl. If we really feel this way about each other, what difference does it make if she has money and I’m just a mug? Then when I knocked on the door of your stateroom after they let me go in Honolulu, you looked at me as if I were dirt.” In his anger, Kelly took hold of her upper arms and shook her. “But I’m not. I’m just a guy who likes you, maybe more than likes you. And no spoiled little rich bitch is going to make a chump out of me.”

Sylvia writhed and twisted in his arms and beat at his chest with her fists. “Let me go.”

The remembered feel and smell of her small body against his excited Kelly beyond reason. He knew what he was doing. He knew it was wrong. He couldn’t help himself. He had a sudden fierce desire to hurt and humiliate this girl, hurt her as she had hurt him.

His breathing was as labored as hers. "I'll let you go. When I'm finished with you." He held her at arm's length with one hand and hooked the fingers of the other in the material of the bodice of her dress and there was the sound of tearing cloth as he stripped her to her bra and panties. "Now you're beginning to look like the girl I remember. Let's see if you are the same girl." He ripped off her last two garments and Sylvia cried out as he roughly fondled her. "Yes, by Jesus, you are," he panted. "Remember me?" Then, as a last gesture of contempt, he pushed her away from him and the back of her knees struck the mattress. The now sobbing black-haired girl fell on her back, spread-eagled, crosswise of the bed. Kelly walked to the edge of it and stood looking down at her. "Now, have a good time by yourself."

He turned to leave the room and couldn't. The floor tilted under him. Sweat dripped into his eyes and blurred his vision. Kelly wanted to reach out and grasp something and hang on. And all he could see was the girl on the bed.

She made no attempt to cover herself. Her spread legs dangled over the edge of the mattress. Her soft white arms thrown over her head, her good eye slitted and sullen, her other eye swollen almost shut, Sylvia lay there, looking up at him.

Without conscious volition, Kelly reached down and cupped one of her breasts. Then he'd gone too far to turn back. He had to have her. He took her, with no gentleness, basic, primitive, fundamental, rape with tacit consent, if not the co-operation of the raped. It went on for a long time. There seemed to be no end to it. Finally, with no change of facial expression, apparently eager to get it over with, almost contemptuously, Sylvia drew up her feet and dug the high heels on the ends of her splayed legs into the edge of the mattress and helped him.

Kelly felt ashamed. He hadn't meant this to happen. He'd wanted to hurt her, humiliate her. How did a man apologize? What did he say to a girl he'd just raped? I'm sorry?

Sylvia's wet cheek was turned sideways on the bed. He turned it so he could see her face. Now it was his turn to beg. "Believe me, Sylvia. I didn't mean for this to happen."

The eye inches from his was dull. Her voice sounded completely spent. "It doesn't matter. Nothing matters now." Her eyes searched his face. "I thought you were something special. But you aren't. You're just another

man. Go ahead and dive. And the first time you go down, I hope someone cuts your air hose.” She pushed up at his chest. “And now, if you’ve ‘finished’ with me, will you please get the hell out of here!”

Chapter 9

THE TWO DESTROYERS sailed shortly before noon. Judging by the activity on the far side of the harbor, the coming and going of small boats, jangling of ship's bells, the *Kailua* was due to sail momentarily,

Here it was different. Here, on this isolated jetty, against which the *Sally B* was snugged, time not only stood still, it seemed to have reverted. The only motion evident was the lazy waving of the fronds of the palm trees fringing the shore of the cove and the graceful flight of the Bosun birds and terns and frigates swooping low over the sloop. The only sounds were the muffled voices of the two girls in the cabin, an occasional order from Hanson, and the protesting cough and groan of the power winch as it lifted, then swung the heavy crates of diving gear and ship's supplies aboard.

The hot sun felt good on Kelly's back. Stripped to a pair of white dungarees, his feet bare, he squatted on the rotted planking of the jetty and checked the spit valve on the diving helmet he'd just taken out of a crate. He felt better now that he knew he'd be using his own gear. When a man was working at thirty fathoms, with nothing but a helmet, a diving dress and a constant flow of air to keep him from being mashed to a bloody pulp, he wanted as many of the odds on his side as possible.

Satisfied that the valve was working correctly, Kelly rocked back on his heels and lighted a cigarette. He studied the two native crewmen whom Hanson had signed. They seemed to be able and willing workers. Their names were Rara and Kavi. Both were full-blooded Samoans—big, powerful men. They were familiar with the local waters and had worked as divers' tenders according to their papers.

Kelly turned his attention to the sky and made some mental calculations. If everything went well and the weather held, they should be over the Witch, or at least on the atoll near where the yacht had foundered, in a week or ten days. Say another week for sweeping and preliminary dives. Then, once they had the wreck buoyed, if the Witch wasn't too badly silted, if her decks hadn't collapsed, if he didn't have to cut away too much or use the grab hook too often, he should be in the cabin and hooked on to the captain's safe in a matter of hours.

Kelly looked from the sky to the open doorway of the cabin. He still felt as if an invisible hand was tying knots in his groin every time he heard Sylvia's voice. She hadn't succeeded in firing him but she sure as hell had him where she wanted him. He couldn't look at her or touch her no matter how long they might be cooped up on the sloop. He was too ashamed of himself. All he wanted now was to fulfill the terms of his contract with her late stepfather's estate and get as far away from her as he could, as soon as possible. He was grateful for one thing. If Sylvia had wanted to be nasty about it, she could have caused him a lot of trouble. Instead, when he met her this morning, other than a suggestion of resentment and contempt in her eyes, she greeted him as usual.

Hanson paused in stowing supplies to ask him how he was doing.

"Fine," Kelly said.

Hines came forward as Rara, handling the winch, prepared to lift a heavy crated compressor. "Easy with that," he cautioned. "If that thing ever slipped she'd go right through the jetty, right through the bottom of the *Sally B*, for that matter."

"Right through," Hanson agreed.

"I'll be careful," the winch man said.

Kelly got to his feet and stretched his legs by walking over to where Joe Phillips was taking a few frames of 16mm pictures of the loading of the sloop. Now that he'd changed from street clothes into a pair of swimming trunks, he looked like a different person. His pudginess was all in his face. What had looked like fat under his suit was really muscle. It was also evident he'd been around. He had a Marine emblem tattooed on the inside of one forearm and the slightly corny "Honor, God and Country" tattooed on the other.

"How's the stomach?" Kelly asked him.

Phillips slapped his belly. "On land, fine. I ate enough breakfast for two guys. But I'm not looking forward to the next few weeks." He shook his head ruefully. "I still don't understand how I got rooked into this thing. There I was, minding my own business, taking pictures of wrecks on freeways—"

Kelly laughed. "And here you are in Samoa."

"And here I am in Samoa. And I thought I'd seen the last of the islands when I kissed Guam good-by from the ass end of a hospital ship."

Hanson paused in what he was doing to say, sharply, "Watch your language there, Phillips." He added, "And that goes for all you men. Remember we have ladies aboard."

"I'm sorry," Phillips apologized. "I'll watch it." He moved closer to the side of the *Sally B* to get an angle shot of the crate being lifted. "Oh, well," he called over his shoulder, "who knows? If my stomach holds out I may be able to pick up a few extra dollars by showing the films I take here on TV back in the States."

"Could be," Kelly agreed.

He turned as a deep blast of the *Kailua*'s whistle shattered the quiet of the harbor. The two succeeding blasts reverberated off the wooded slopes and set the terns to screaming. Janice and Sylvia came out on deck and shaded their eyes with their hands, as they stared at the departing cruise ship. Both girls were wearing halters and shorts. They made an attractive picture and Phillips turned his camera on them.

"Don't tell my wife," he winked at Janice. "But I think I may even grow to like my work before this assignment is over."

The blonde girl thumbed her nose at him and Phillips pretended to be shocked.

'Please. Not in front of Captain Hanson. Remember we have gentlemen aboard.'

Hanson wasn't amused.

Kelly looked at the now moving *Kailua*, then back at Sylvia. Even with her discolored eye, she was lovely. He wished he didn't know how really lovely she was. The still humid heat on the jetty reminded him of the shabby hotel room over the cheap café and the memory left him breathless. Janice walked to the rail of the sloop and waved the *Kailua* good-by. "Am I glad to see the last of her."

Phillips swung his camera around and took a few frames of the departing vessel. "Why?"

Janice told him. "I didn't make a point of it but I never felt safe aboard her after the night Miss Ambler was killed."

"Nor I," Sylvia said. She glanced at Kelly, then away. "I discovered the body, remember?"

Rara was having trouble with the crate he was trying to swing aboard the Hines took over the controls. "'Ere, Let me 'ave 'er, chum." He nodded agreement with Janice and Sylvia. "I know just 'ow you girls feel." The old

man added, soberly, "It ain't a very nice feeling, what with stabbings and stranglings going on, and the wrong people getting suspicioned, to know as 'ow you're sailing with a clever killer as a shipmate. Probably one of the men or lydies we rubbed elbows with every day."

Hanson was impatient with them. "Look. Please. If you don't mind, let's stow that kind of talk. What happened on the pier in Los Angeles and aboard the *Kailua* had nothing to do with any of us. It's over and done with. And it's no good talking about it."

Janice was amused. "What's the matter? Are you afraid we'll jinx the expedition?"

"Yes," Hanson said in all sincerity. "I am. You know the old saying about bad things happening in threes."

"Ha," Janice scoffed. "That's nonsense." She admitted, "Or maybe I'm just sore because the killer stuck me with an unfinished story."

Hines revved the engine of the winch and swung the heavy crate free of the jetty. Then he began to lift it with skill and care. "I wouldn't be too sure about that, miss," the old man said garrulously. "You wait and see. Sooner or later the law will catch up to 'im or 'er. It always does."

Hanson shouted in anger, "Stow that gab and steady as she goes."

"Stow that gab and steady as she goes," Hines repeated.

Later, Kelly was never certain how it happened. He knew he was standing with Phillips, their backs to the rail of the sloop, watching the *Kailua* pick up seaway. Then everything happened at once. He heard the winch engine racing free. There was the twang of twisted wire cables and a sharp slap of metal behind him. Then Sylvia was screaming.

"Matt! Look out!" she yelled louder. "Into the water, quick!" Nos

Without stopping to think, Kelly flung himself forward and sideways off the jetty. His one glimpse of the scene was confused. Hanson, Hines and Janice seemed to be fighting the controls of the winch and the crate had swung up and fallen free in a twisted tangle of snapped cables.

He hit the water flat and as he sank below the surface a second heavy impact made his tortured eardrums feel as if they'd just been clapped between a pair of powerful hammers. When he surfaced again, the *Kailua* was still blowing her whistle and Rara and Kavi had joined Hanson in an effort to restrain Hines who was beating at the winch with a hammer as he spat out pungent four-letter words. He didn't see any of the others, or the crate.

He swam back to the jetty, slowly. Sylvia was kneeling on the edge, holding her hand down to him, Gripping her hand he pulled himself up on a stringer and felt his stomach turn over as he looked at the hole in the planking.

Evidently Phillips hadn't reacted as quickly as he had. Nor had he been so lucky. His knees giving under him, Kelly got to his feet and walked to the edge of the hole and looked down into the water. Phillips would never take any pictures that would be shown on TV travelogues. He would never be seasick again. He was lying mashed in thirty feet of water, weighted down by the splintered planking and the eight-hundred-pound compressor.

Hines stopped beating at the winch. "I killed 'im," the old man sobbed. "I killed 'im."

Hanson took off his white captain's cap and mopped the sweat from his face with his sleeve. His voice sounded as sick as Kelly felt. "Don't pay any attention to Hines," he said, quietly. "We all know how he feels. But we all saw what happened. First the throttle jammed and then the cables snapped."

Kelly felt pain in his arm for the first time and looked down. Sylvia's nails were biting into the flesh of his forearm so deeply he thought he'd been hit by the tail end of the cable. Her voice was barely audible. "Are you all right?" she demanded.

He looked for and found Janice. She was standing at the rail, gripping the wood, looking down through the splintered planking, her mouth open and her lips moving as if she were screaming but she wasn't making a sound.

"See what you can do for her," Kelly told Sylvia.

Then he looked back at the men around the winch. It seemed as though Hanson was either unwilling or unable to cope with the situation. Kelly quietly took over.

"Okay," he said. "It happened. That's the third one. We can't do Phillips any good by blowing our tops." He nodded at Rara and Kavi. "You boys break out the rest of my diving gear and rig up a hand pump and I'll see what I can do about getting him up from there."

Chapter 10

THE HEAT made the lingering stench of copra even more pronounced. Without the shelter of a canvas awning, once he was in diving dress, Kelly felt unbearably hot and uncomfortable. He was glad when Rara screwed on the face plate of his helmet and lowered him over the side on a hastily rigged stage made of a section of the ship's ladder.

The natives knew their business. Both Samoans were experienced diver dressers and tenders. He was in relatively shallow water but Rara fished his lines with practiced ease, while Kavi was equally expert on the hand pump that they'd broken out.

The water was cool and clear. At this depth he could see almost as well as he could on the surface. Kelly first tried to pry, then muscle the heavy crate off the body but even with the added buoyancy given it by the water, he was unable to budge it. It just settled that much deeper in the silt on the bottom. He would have to wait until Hanson put fresh cables on the winch and replaced the broken ratchet. Not that it mattered to Phillips. He was dead.

Kelly reached for his life line to signal Rara to haul him up and changed his mind. Instead, he valved some of the air out of his suit and waited on the bottom while the winch was being repaired.

He hoped what had happened had been an accident. It must have been an accident. He couldn't see how it could be anything else. Still, things seemed to be adding up. He'd been right beside Phillips when the crate had fallen and only the night before Sylvia had asked him to name his own price to tear up his contract. One diver with a pair of broken legs, another party with a broken neck. Of course Sylvia hadn't been at the controls of the winch, and it had been her scream that saved his life. She'd told him last night:

I thought you were something special. But you aren't. You're just another man. Go ahead and dive. And the first time you go down, I hope someone cuts your air hose.

Kelly leaned against the crated compressor and considered Digby Hines. It seemed ludicrous to suspect Hines of staging an accident. He had nothing against Hines. As far as he knew the former steward of the yacht

had nothing against him. The old man seemed to like him. Hines had no reason to want either him or Phillips dead. In a sense, all three of them were hired hands, doing their respective jobs. The tragedy on the jetty had completely broken Hines. Since it had taken place Hines had been little better than a babbling idiot. Kelly doubted that he'd be good for much of anything for the balance of the trip. If he knew the man's type, his remorse would find its level in a succession of whisky bottles.

First Perkins. Then May. Now Phillips. It could be Hanson was right. Perhaps fatalities did occur in threes. In that case, for what consolation it was, they'd had their bad luck.

A school of brightly colored tropical fish pressed their working mouths to the face plate of Kelly's helmet. Their soundless mouthing reminded him of Janice. The blonde girl was taking Phillips' death hard. Kelly wondered if he had heard Phillips in her stateroom. It could well be that Janice was having an affair with her cameraman. In that case, Phillips had made a remarkable recovery aboard ship or he'd been pretending to have seasickness.

Why?

Kelly moved his helmet from side to side. There was so much he didn't know. And that included the real reason why Mr. Harris, acting for the estate, had agreed to allow a newspaperwoman and photographer to accompany the expedition.

The fish were blocking his vision. Kelly stretched the elastic on the wrist of his diving dress and frightened them away by squirting a stream of bubbles at them. He was mildly amused watching them. Despite all the lurid sea fiction about sea divers fighting off huge sharks and octopi, using sheath knives to protect themselves, he'd never known of a diver who'd been attacked on the bottom of the sea.

A diver had much more to fear from fouled life lines and pinched air hoses and a chance fall to a great depth before he could adjust his flow of air. He had reason. For every foot he descended, a diver had to withstand an increase of nearly one-half pound per square inch of pressure. Even in a shallow dive, at thirty-three feet, the approximate depth at which he was now standing, he had thirty pounds pressing him, just double the normal surface pressure.

Below thirty-three feet, the dividing line between mud larks and divers, the going got rough. Only two things kept a man alive, compressed

air in his suit and lungs and the Haldane table. At twenty fathoms, still ten fathoms less than where the Sea Witch was supposed to be, he would have to withstand a pressure of almost sixty tons, a weight that could crush a man to jelly, make him just so much bloody flesh and bones, two hundred and twenty pounds of human flesh crammed up into his helmet. Even if nothing went wrong below, after he completed his dive, he didn't dare just to pop to the surface. He had to come up at the slow speed that would be governed by the minutes he'd spent under pressure. For every minute under pressure, he had to spend a minute ascending, decompressing as he came. Otherwise the accumulated nitrogen in his blood would boil and either kill him or give him the bends and perhaps leave him permanently paralyzed.

Diving, Kelly thought, was a hell of a way for a man to make a living. Still, all the divers he knew, himself included, wouldn't do anything else after they'd made their first few dives.

He felt a tug on his line and looked up. The winch cables were snaking slowly through the water. Hanson, too, knew his business. He had a light hand on the throttle. Too many topside men had the erroneous idea that just because they dropped metal into water, it would float.

Working swiftly, with the deft touch of the expert, Kelly made the slings fast to the crate and stood out from under before he signaled for Hanson to take it away. Then he tied a line around Phillips and signaled Rara to bring them both up.

A small crowd had formed on the shore end of the jetty and a native policeman kept them from getting too close. As Rara led him to an upended box and sat him down so he could remove his face plate, Kelly was relieved to see neither Janice or Sylvia. The dead man's body was awful to look at.

Hanson shut off the winch and came over to help Rara and Kavi undress Kelly. "You worried me, staying down so long. You okay, Kelly?"

"I'm fine," Kelly assured him. He sucked at the cigarette Rara put between his lips, then added, "But you'd better throw a tarp over Phillips before the girls see him."

Hanson covered the body with a piece of canvas. "Poor devil."

Kelly asked how Hines was taking it.

"Bad," Hanson said, sourly. "I sent him into town after the law and he must have stopped in every bar he came to. A lot of help he's going to be."

"I figured that," Kelly said.

The inquest was very informal and held in the crowded cabin. The police official in charge, a man named Munson, tall and lean with years of living in the tropics, seemed as interested in the proposed salvage attempt as he was in the death of the cameraman.

When the inquest was convened, Hanson, in his capacity as captain of the *Sally B*, was the first one called upon to testify. He told a straightforward story, making no attempt to embellish the facts.

Munson was thoughtful as Hanson finished. "I see. I don't know why but nine out of ten salvage and treasure expeditions seem to be plagued with these accidents." He looked at Sylvia. "As I understand it, Miss Ryan, there was some trouble on the pier before you sailed. And there was also a death aboard the *Kailua*."

"That's right," Sylvia said. "A seaman named Perkins was stabbed in the washroom on the pier. Then that same night, aboard the *Kailua*, the girl who discovered the body was strangled."

"The assumption being that she'd seen the killer?"

"I believe that was the official theory."

Munson dropped the subject. "Have you anything to add to Captain Hanson's testimony?"

"No," Sylvia said, "I haven't."

Munson turned his attention to Janice. "How about you, Miss Hart?"

Kelly felt sorry for Janice. Whatever Phillips had been to her, she was taking his death very hard. She'd aged five years in half an hour. Still, after her initial soundless mouthing of the terror welling in her, she recovered her composure and hadn't shed a single tear. It was as though her grief was too great to be relieved by a superficial, surface display of emotion.

"No," Janice answered him quietly. "I have nothing to add."

"And you?" Munson asked Kelly.

Kelly was still wearing the red knit cap he used to cushion his helmet. He took it off and used it to mop the sweat from his face and chest. "Like Hanson just said," he told Munson, "I was standing beside Phillips watching the *Kailua* gather seaway and I didn't see a thing. If Miss Ryan hadn't screamed for me to throw myself into the water, I'd have been under the crate with Phillips." He looked at the white-faced girl. "That reminds me. Thanks."

She gave him a cold look. "You're welcome. I meant the warning for both of you."

Munson questioned Rara and Kavi next, then finished filling out the official form in front of him. "Well, that seems to take care of the unfortunate incident, shall we call it?" He patted his forehead with a folded handkerchief. "At least officially. You folks going on?"

"I don't see why -not," Hanson said. "We've been planning this thing for six months. And if we don't make the attempt now, it may be a year or more before we can try again."

Munson nodded. "You're cutting the weather fairly fine, as it is. You were the first mate of the Sea Witch, were you not, Mr. Hanson?"

"That's right."

"With Jack Bellamy as captain?"

"Yes, sir."

"Bellamy was quite well known here in Samoa."

"A good man."

Munson lighted a cigarette. "I can't say," he said, dryly, "that our knowledge of him is very favorable." He held up his hand before Hanson could speak. "Don't misunderstand me. Bellamy was an excellent seaman and I'm sure he did everything possible to save the Witch."

Hanson was slightly mollified. "He did."

Munson sucked at his cigarette. "I was referring to his reputation both here and in Apia and in New Zealand and Australia, for that matter."

"Reputation for what?" Sylvia asked.

"For being a ladies' man."

"Jack did like the girls," Hanson admitted.

Munson's smile was more of a pucker. "He not only liked the girls, particularly blonde ones, he lived very high when he had the money. And from our knowledge of him, he wasn't too particular how he got it. We were all surprised when we heard that the late Mr. Ryan had engaged him to captain the Sea Witch."

"Where was this?" Kelly asked.

"I thought I-told you," Hanson broke in. "In Sydney. Just after Miss Ryan flew home. Bill Prescott, our master until then, went ashore the night before we sailed and got himself knifed in some dive. At least that's what the local police decided when they picked him up floating in the harbor."

Another one, Kelly thought. It was definitely the first he'd heard of the Witch having two masters. Hanson had never mentioned it to him.

Munson gathered his papers and stood up. “Well, good luck to all of you. And let’s hope there are no more—ah—accidents.”

“Let’s hope,” Kelly agreed.

He and Hanson and Rara and Kavi followed Munson out on deck and Hines staggered close behind them. Phillips’ body had been removed. The small crowd that had formed on the jetty was gone and the birds were circling the sloop again.

Hanson, Rara and Kavi returned to their interrupted loading. Hines stood weaving a moment, then staggered aft and sat on a hatch. He took a bottle from his pocket and drank. Munson looked at the old man thoughtfully, then shook his head. “Poor devil.” He turned as if to go, then turned back. “Oh. Tell me one thing, will you, Kelly?”

Kelly leaned on the rail. “If I can.”

“You saw the man who was killed on the pier in Los Angeles?”

“I did.”

“What did he look like?”

“Tall, Thin-faced. Gray hair. I’d say in his late forties.”

“Any distinguishing marks?”

Kelly thought a moment. “One. He had a blue sea serpent tattooed across the back of his right hand.”

“I see,” Munson answered and seemed to lose all interest in the matter. “Well, good luck, Kelly. And be careful.”

Kelly shook the offered hand. “Thanks. But why the questions about the guy on the pier?”

For a moment Kelly had a distinct impression that Mr. Munson was going to say something important. If he was, he changed his mind. “Just a wild idea that occurred to me,” he said, smiling. “But it’s too fantastic even to mention. Well, good-by again. And good luck.”

Kelly lighted a cigarette he didn’t want. The smoke tasted hot and bitter in his mouth. He wished he knew three things: what Mr. Munson was going to say and didn’t; why the police official had dragged in the bad character of the drowned captain of the yacht at the inquest; why Hanson hadn’t told him there had been two masters of the Witch.

The farther away from Los Angeles and the deeper into this thing he got the more it took on a permanent air of unreality.

Coincidence could only stretch so far. There was too much that he didn’t understand.

Chapter 11

THE SEA WAS CALM. There was no wind. The morning mist was rising. Dawn wasn't far away. Kelly raised himself in the hammock he'd slung on deck and rubbed sleep from his eyes.

The sails of the *Sally B* were reefed. Barely making seaway under the thrust of her auxiliary diesel, the sloop was nosing through a narrow pass in a jagged barrier reef enclosing a placid lagoon. As the light grew stronger he could see the shadowy silhouette of palm trees.

He rolled his hammock and joined Hanson at the wheel. "It seems we've arrived."

Hanson was proud of himself. He had reason to be. "Right on the nose." He called forward to Rara, "Stand by to drop the hook."

The big Samoan repeated the order. "Stand by to drop the hook!"

Kelly studied the lagoon in the light of the brightening day. They were moving into the lee of a large island. Beyond it the lagoon extended into a six-mile-long green lake, surrounded on all sides by the barrier reef through which they'd just passed. The length of the reef was sprinkled with islets, some of which were fairly large, but most of them only a few feet out of the water and sparsely vegetated.

Kelly returned his attention to the island. It was about a mile and a half long and half that wide across. The windward side was strewn with great boulders of coral but here, on the lee side, a crescent-shaped white sand beach ran the length of the island. The mist still concealed the height of a wooded slope.

"What do they call it?" he asked Hanson.

"That I wouldn't know," Hanson said. "I don't believe it has a name. At least I've never heard it. But it's part of the Motu group."

"What about the Witch?"

"What about her?"

"Where is she lying from here?"

Hanson pointed back the way they'd come. "Almost dead astern. I'd say about two miles out."

"I suppose we'll have to sweep for her."

“Unless,” Hanson said sarcastically, “you can see to thirty fathoms deep.” He scanned the shoreline of the island they were passing, then swung the wheel hard to port and slowed the engine. “Let go the hook.”

“Let go the hook!” echoed Rara.

The loud splash shattered the heavy silence of the lagoon and startled a flight of sea birds into the dawn. The *Sally B* yawed as the hook caught, then swung idly at anchor.

Hanson shut off the engine and pushed his cap back on his head. He continued to be proud of himself. “Not a bad piece of navigation, if I do say so myself.”

Kelly studied the other man’s face. He had changed. He was no longer the former first mate of the *Sea Witch*. He was the current captain of the *Sally B* and during the four-day passage from Pago Pago, Hanson had made certain that no one forgot it. Nothing anyone did had pleased him. He’d found constant fault with Rara and Kavi. He’d even been unnecessarily short with the girls, Sylvia as well as Janice. He’d pinpointed a speck of land in hundreds of miles of ocean.

Kelly answered Hanson. “I’ll buy that. It was a damn good piece of navigation.”

Hines rolled out of his hammock, staggered aft and peered over the rail. “What’s the matter?”

“Nothing’s the matter,” Hanson said. “We’re here.”

“Fine.” Hines plucked a pint bottle of whisky out of the front of his shirt. “Let’s have a drink on it.”

Hanson knocked the bottle out of his hand and over the rail. Then he caught the old man by the front of his shirt and slapped him across the mouth until it bled.

Hines was indignant. “What’s the idea?”

Hanson told him. “You’ve had your drinking. So you feel bad about Phillips. We all do. Now sober up and stay sober.”

Hines gave him a long look, then he spat blood over the side and shuffled forward.

Hanson called after him, “And don’t bother looking for your whisky. I found it.”

Kelly looked at the island. It was unusual to find an atoll with such a profusion of mature cocoanut palms not inhabited. He judged that at one time, before the government had moved them, while the atoll was still being

considered as an H-bomb testing site, it had supported a number of families. Behind the vivid green of the young palms growing down to the shore, he could see the unthatched ruins of several native houses and behind them what appeared to be a small shack with a red tin roof. He pointed it out to Hanson.

"I know," Hanson said. "Hines and I lived in it for three weeks. It was a ship-watching post during the war." He added, thoughtfully, "It was in bad condition then and it's probably in worse shape now. But I thought we could fix it up so Miss Ryan and Miss Hart can use it while we sweep for the Witch and you make your preliminary dives."

Kelly nodded, "That's a good idea. We are a little cramped." He could sympathize with Hanson. It hadn't been an easy passage. Janice and Sylvia had spent most of it in brief bathing suits or tight shorts and skimpy halters, sprawled on air mattresses on the deck, trying to acquire sun tans.

Kelly passed his palm over his mouth. Sylvia Ryan continued to be an enigma. In the room in Pago Pago on the night she'd tried to fire him, after he'd lost his head and forced himself on her she'd told him:

Go ahead and dive. And the first time you go down, I hope someone cuts your air hose.

Then the next morning, when the crate that had killed Phillips had fallen, she'd saved his life.

"Now, take Miss Hart," Hanson said. "She looks like a hot little number. She was doing plenty with someone on the *Kailua*. But will she give me a tumble? No. All she does all day is sit and stare. If she feels so bad about Phillips getting killed, why doesn't she toss up her job and fly back to the States?"

"I've wondered that myself," Kelly replied.

Janice Hart was as much of a puzzle as Sylvia. She'd changed even more than Hanson had. Since the accident on the jetty, the blonde newspaperwoman had withdrawn into an inner shell peopled only by her thoughts. Kelly couldn't remember seeing her smile since they'd left Pago Pago. She answered when spoken to but she never ventured an opinion or a comment. And even when she was exchanging girl talk with Sylvia, she seemed to be brooding.

Hanson shook his head. "Women. A guy just can't figure them."

There was the sound of bare feet on the deck behind them, as Sylvia came out of the cabin and joined them at the rail. Her short hair was

becomingly tousled. The discoloration under her right eye was beginning to fade but the bruise on her cheek gave her a certain wanton look. With every step she took her thin negligee parted to reveal the swishing skirt of her sheer nightdress.

You shouldn't, baby, Kelly thought. You really shouldn't.

Without turning his head, Kelly glanced sideways at Hanson. The big man was openly admiring Sylvia. All men had a boiling point. From what Hanson had just told him, he'd about reached his. They were five men and two women on a lush tropical atoll. Hanson was blunt and direct. His type ate when they were hungry, drank when they were thirsty and acted on impulse, taking what they wanted when they wanted it and thinking of consequences later.

If he lays a hand on Sylvia, Kelly thought, I'll kill him.

She joined them at the rail. "Why have we stopped?" she asked Hanson.

Hanson touched the brim of his cap. "This is it, Miss Ryan. We're here."

Sylvia wasn't impressed with the island. "Don't tell me the yacht went down in a lagoon."

Hanson flushed. "No, Miss Ryan. She's outside the reef." He pointed at the pass they'd just negotiated. "Out there somewhere."

"I thought you knew exactly where she sank."

Hanson looked a little annoyed. "We do. That is, as exact as possible. But we'll have to find her and hook a line to her before Mr. Kelly can start diving."

"So?"

Hanson looked as if he were counting mentally. "So that may take some days. And as there is a shack of sorts on the island, I think you and Miss Hart will be more comfortable in it than you would be on the sloop while we are sweeping for the Witch. Sweeping is wet, monotonous work."

Sylvia studied the island. "What sort of a shack?"

"A crude one."

"That thing with the red tin roof?"

"Yes, miss."

Sylvia made a grimace of distaste. "It's probably filthy."

"Rara and Kavi can take care of that."

"Are there any natives on the island?"

“No.”

Sylvia seemed to notice Kelly for the first time. “Oh, good morning.” It was the way she said it.

He felt a fine film of perspiration form on his face. The back of his neck felt hot. He wanted to take her over his knee and pull up her nightdress and spank some of the bitchiness out of her. But he was honest with himself. He was in love with Sylvia and he wanted the girl to love him.

He took a deep breath. “Good morning.”

His return of her salutation was a waste of time. Sylvia had forgotten she’d even spoken to him or she seemed to. Looking at the island, she said, “Well, Janice and I will get dressed and we can go ashore and look at the shack. At least, it won’t smell of rancid cocoanuts. I don’t suppose there’s any fresh water, like a pool or something, where we can bathe?”

Hanson took off his white cap and wiped the leather sweatband. “It just so happens there is, Miss Ryan. A small waterfall forms a pool a few hundred yards up from the hut. And that’s something you don’t often find on an atoll this small.”

Sylvia shrugged and walked back to the cabin. Kelly followed her down the deck and through the door with his eyes, then realized that Hanson was watching him.

The big blonde seaman was amused. “And speaking of what we were speaking,” he said wryly, “you’re not doing so good, are you, Kelly? Not since we left Honolulu.”

“Kelly didn’t bother to answer him and Hanson wiped the smile from his face and walked forward. His tone was unnecessarily brusque. “All right, you, Rara and Kavi,” he called. “Look alive. Up off your lazy brown duffs and ready the dinghy to lower away.”

“Aye, sir,” Rara said with no enthusiasm. “Ready the dinghy to lower away.”

Hanson was confusing officiousness with efficiency and both Samoans hated him for it. It showed in the way they looked at him when they thought no one was noticing them. They were able seamen and tenders. They wanted to be treated as such. Sooner or later, Hanson would go too far with them.

Chapter 12

THE SMALL BOAT was overcrowded. It rode so low in the water there was barely an inch of freeboard. Hanson was silent and thoughtful. Rara and Kavi were surly. Hines was shakily sober and nursing a terrific hangover. Perhaps because of the heat and the mirror-like surface of the placid green water reflecting the passage of the boat, the whole expedition seemed even less real than it had at any time previous. As the boat touched bottom, he suddenly wondered why, if the papers he was supposed to recover from the safe of the sunken yacht were so important to the Ryan estate, its executors hadn't equipped a proper expedition, complete with a proper diver's tender having a recompression chamber and at least one more qualified diver to help him if he should get into trouble on the bottom. After all, he wasn't diving in a bath tub. He wished now he'd asked for more money. He had a feeling he'd earn it.

The remains of a crude coral dock, tumbled around by the wind and waves of some forgotten storm, jutted out a few yards from the beach and ended in waist-deep water. A beaten-up native canoe was pulled up on the sand above the high-water mark but there was no other sign of human habitation.

Janice remarked that there seemed to be at least one family on the atoll and Hines shook his head carefully.

"Begging your pardon, miss, but that canoe was 'ere when me and Sven was 'ere before."

A faded path edged with pieces of coral led up from the beach and through a growth of young trees to the shack with the red tin roof. On both sides of the path, besides the skeletons of their houses, there was evidence that the island had supported a number of families. At one time there'd been a community garden planted to sweet potatoes and the vines were now growing wild and choking everything in their path. Breadfruit trees grew in abundance. There were papayas and wild bananas and Kelly also saw animal droppings, probably from wild pigs.

The shack he'd seen from the deck of the sloop was in a rather large clearing overlooking the weather side of the island. It was a typical ship-watcher's shack. Kelly had seen a dozen similar ones during the war.

Considering its age and storms it had survived, the structure was in remarkably good condition. There were two fair-sized rooms, a porch across the front and a cook house lean-to in the rear, complete with a rusted iron stove. The thatch of the porch roof had blown off but there was nothing wrong with the hut that a good sweeping out wouldn't take care of. Furniture of sorts was placed around the rooms. Two crude beds with mouldy mattresses were in the inner room.

Sylvia was still not impressed with the shack. "The most I can say for it is that it's a little better than that smelly cabin on the sloop." She turned to Kelly, "How long do you think we'll have to stay here?"

Kelly told her the truth. "I haven't the least idea."

"Approximately how long?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"On how long it takes us to buoy the yacht and what I find when I go down to her."

"Two weeks? Three weeks? A month?"

Kelly said, rather hotly, "I told you I haven't any idea."

"Well, you don't need to shout at me."

Ignoring them, Janice sat down on the stoop of the porch. "All right. We're here. What's the first step on the agenda?"

Hanson outlined the day's program. "Well, after the old man gets breakfast, the first thing we'll do is to have Rara and Kavi make this place livable. Then we'll move your belongings and Miss Ryan's belongings and most of the supplies ashore. Then if there is enough daylight left to make it worth our while, we'll make a sweep or two for the Witch, at least break out the gear." Hanson turned to Kelly. "Is that okay?"

Kelly said it was fine with him. He'd come too far to back out. All he wanted now was to get the thing over and done with and then get as far away from Sylvia as he possibly could.

There were two objectors to the program. When Hanson told Rara and Kavi what they were expected to do, the men protested violently. Cleaning and repairing a house, they insisted, was woman's work and they'd signed on as seamen. After much heated argument and a whispered consultation between themselves, they agreed to work on the shack.

The morning was long and hot. Janice and Sylvia spent most of it alternating between the sloop and the shack, helping to carry their

possessions ashore. Kelly carried supplies and spelled Hanson at the oars of the small boat. After a hurried lunch, he helped Hanson and Hines break out the crates containing the sweeping gear.

Bad luck continued to dog them. The crate containing part of the sweep, the most important part, the grappling hook, was missing. It must have been left behind either in Pago Pago or Los Angeles.

It was too much for Hines. He was ready to quit. "One bloody thing after another. Why don't we chuck the 'ole thing and say to 'ell with it?"

Hanson told him, "Because we signed on to do a job. I mean to do it."

Kelly made no comment. He'd never known quite what to think of Hanson and he wondered how sincere he was right now. He was entirely too good to be true, too studied a copy of the clean-cut, all-American seaman. From cabin boy to captain in one long continuous brown-nosing. Kelly thought of something he'd meant to ask him for the past five days.

"By the way, Hanson—"

"Yes?"

"Why didn't you or Miss Ryan or Mr. Harris tell me there'd been two captains of the Sea Witch, that this guy Bellamy had just taken over in Sydney?"

Hanson considered the question. "I suppose because we thought you knew. I thought everybody knew. It was in all the newspaper accounts."

It was hot on the unsheltered deck. Kelly wiped sweat from his face with his arm. "I must have missed it, I guess. You'd sailed with him before?"

"Both of us had." He shook his head. "Poor Jack. 'E liked life, 'e did."

Kelly said, "Munson didn't give him a very good character."

"No," Hines admitted, "'e didn't, for a fact." The old man looked out to sea. "But whatever 'e did, it's all in the big log now. Poor devil. 'E's out there somewhere. Went down with 'is ship, 'e did, like a proper captain."

"All right, all right," Hanson said. "Let's leave dead men lie and see what we can do about rigging a hook."

Between the three men and the ship's stores they finally rigged a hook. The grapple had to be strong enough to bite into the Witch when they snagged her and to serve as an anchor for the shot line that Kelly would descend, once they buoyed the wreck.

It was late afternoon when they finished and shortly before sunset when they went ashore. Sylvia and Janice were not in the shack. The two

natives said they thought the girls had gone for a walk.

The roof of the porch was freshly thatched, as was the roof of the cook-house. Most of the rust had been scraped from the stove. The mouldy mattresses had been burned and replaced with fresh ones from the sloop. The Samoans had done a good job of cleaning up the hut but they were still surly. They renewed their argument that they were seamen and that Hanson was forcing them to do work they had not signed on to do. Kelly sympathized with them but kept out of the discussion. As Captain Hanson of the *Sally B*, it was Hanson's problem. He was relieved, however, when Hanson informed the two brawny Samoans that, in the future, anything they were called on to do would relate to the handling of the sloop or sweeping or tending Kelly's life line and hose, then relieved them of all duty for the rest of the day. Their point won, Rara and Kavi were as happy as children and swaggered off down the path toward the lagoon. They said they were going to spear fresh mullet for supper.

Kelly was hot. He was tired. He felt sticky. He wanted a swim. He wanted to see more of the island. He asked the old man how long it would be before supper was ready. Hines told him it would be about an hour.

"Good," Kelly said. Then, carefully avoiding the path to the fresh-water pool which Hanson had made taboo to all male members of the ship's company, he walked across the narrow island to the outer beach and stripped to his shorts and waded into the breakers.

The water was comfortably cool. The sea felt good on his body. He swam for perhaps fifteen minutes. When he returned to the beach and dressed, the great cocoanut crabs had come out and were waving their claws in a ghoulish dance as they stripped the white meat from the smashed nuts on the sand. Kelly watched them awhile. Then, tiring of the outer beach, he cut across the island to the lagoon. It was heavy going, mostly uphill. The volcanic slope was pitted with small caves. The underbrush was thick and tangles of creepers caught at his ankles. He was on and above the pool before he realized where he was.

Kelly stood beside a tree and looked down. The pool was small and oval-shaped, formed by a trickle of water issuing from a spring in the rough outcropping of rock rising sheer above it. Unaware they were being observed, both girls completely nude, were standing knee-deep in the water, industriously soaping their bodies.

It was like looking at a beautiful picture, a study in white and gold and black and shades of green. Seeing the two girls as they were seemed normal, in keeping with the setting. Kelly admired them for a moment and walking as quietly as he could to keep from startling them, he continued on down the slope to the lagoon.

The sun was setting fast. It was intensely quiet and still. The fronds of the palms were limp and motionless in the sunset lull of the wind. The glass-like surface of the lagoon was marred only by playfully jumping mullet and the occasional swift rush of a jack as it chased some smaller fish. It was a graphic picture of the ancient law of survival, the strong preying on the weak, the survival of the fittest. Kelly sat on a fallen log and watched the sun dip into the ocean. Suddenly he realized he was hungry and went down the inner beach toward the shack.

He could hear the sound of angry voices long before he reached the clearing. Hanson was at it again. He was giving Rara and Kavi hell about something. And this time the two men were standing up to him.

Kelly reached the shack. "Now what?"

Hanson was red-faced with anger. "Plenty. I have enough to worry about without two dirty-minded natives sneaking through the bushes to spy on Miss Ryan and Miss Hart."

Rara protested hotly. "But is not so. Kavi and me not go to pool. You make pool taboo. We go down to lagoon for mullet."

"You lie."

Kelly saw the blow start but couldn't stop it. Hanson's fist smashed into Rara's face so hard that blood trickled from the corner of his mouth.

"You lie," Hanson repeated. "You only pretended to fish. Then you cut back through the brush to the pool and watched them standing there mother-naked, soaping themselves, in water only up to their knees."

"No! Rara does not lie."

As angry as Hanson now, Rara attempted to fight back. He swung a wild blow to Hanson's body and Hanson hit him again, so hard this time that the Samoan staggered back into a palm tree and slid down its smooth trunk to the ground. As Rara's body struck the ground, Hanson started to kick him and Kavi slipped his sheath knife from its scabbard on his belt and came to his shipmate's assistance.

Kelly pushed Hanson away from Rara and wrapped his powerful arms around Kavi before the angry native could use his knife. "Stop it, you

fools.”

Kavi sullenly subsided. Rara picked himself up and spat blood in the sand.

“You be sorry,” he told Hanson. “You all be very sorry.”

Kelly had no doubt they would. A source of potential trouble had become an open sore. Regardless of whether he was right or wrong, Hanson had pushed the men too far. Rara stood, momentarily undecided, fingering the hilt of his knife; then he and Kavi took a few backward steps and disappeared into the rapidly deepening twilight.

Hanson was still angry. “The damn, dirty, stinking natives. You should have let me kill them. If there’s anything I can’t stand it’s a sneak.” He heard Janice and Sylvia coming down the path from the pool and added quickly, “We better keep quiet about this. There’s no need to frighten the girls.”

Hines laid down the steel pinch bar he’d snatched up. “You’re the captain.”

Hanson appealed to Kelly. “I was right, wasn’t I?”

“I don’t know,” Kelly said.

The scene he’d just witnessed had the same air of unreality about it that tinged everything even remotely connected with the expedition. It was an odd sensation but he had a growing feeling, as distortion followed distortion, that he was no longer master of his own actions or emotions. He felt like a puppet being worked by invisible strings. All he knew was that now, with his life depending on them, he would have to make his dives with surly tenders handling his lines and pump. Hanson had acted like a madman. He’d been too quick, much too quick with his fists.

It wasn’t until later that night, lying in his hammock aboard the *Sally B*, staring up at the stars, that he realized the full significance of the whole affair.

Rara and Kavi might or might not have spied on the girls. *But unless he, himself, had been there, unless he’d been spying on Janice and Sylvia while they bathed, how had Hanson known the girls had been standing mother naked, soaping themselves, in water only up to their knees?*

Chapter 13

IT WAS STILL DARK when Kelly awakened but there was the fresh, clean smell of tropical dawn in the air. A soft breeze was rattling the rigging. Except for a slight yawing from time to time as it swung with the incoming tide, the sloop lay motionless in the water.

He'd slept soundly. He felt refreshed. Reluctant to get out of the hammock, he lay wondering how Janice and Sylvia had slept on their first night alone on the island. He also wondered whether it had been wise to leave the girls alone after the trouble with the two Samoans, but without telling them what had happened and unduly alarming them, there'd been nothing he could do. Hanson had said they were not to know, so that was that.

Kelly turned his head. Hanson had elected to sleep in the cabin the girls had vacated but Hines was snoring soddenly in the hammock he'd slung under the canvas awning they'd rigged aft in case of rain.

Kelly looked back at the sky and lay watching the stars fade. As he came fully awake, some of the sense of well-being left him. In his opinion, the whole expedition had been poorly planned from the beginning. They reached the atoll a month late and on top of all the other factors against them, they were working against time. There'd been no sign of weather so far but they were fringing the monsoon season. If the barometer should begin to drop they could give up all thought of salvage and concentrate on getting back to Pago Pago before it began to blow. If they could get back to Pago Pago.

Impelled by an indefinable urge, he rolled out of his hammock and put on his pants. With the help of a match he looked at the glass. There'd been no change. The barometer was holding.

After lighting a cigarette, he passed the still burning match over Hines' face. The old man burbled and gurgled in his sleep but failed to awaken. Kelly bent over him and smelled his breath. It reeked of whisky. Either Hanson had failed to find all of the cache or he'd relented enough to allow Hines to taper off with a final bottle.

Sitting in his hammock, Kelly continued his thoughts. It seemed odd, considering that Phillips' death had been an accident, that Hines should take

it so hard. If he'd been at sea for as many years as he claimed, he must have seen a lot of men die. It was unusual for a seaman to be so squeamish. However, seeing a man die and killing one, even in an accident, were two different matters.

The sky was beginning to turn pink. If they wanted to make full use of the day it was time for all hands to turn to. Kelly shook Hines awake and went forward to turn out Rara and Kavi.

The *Sally B* was equipped with what was euphemistically called a small fo'castle. It was only a set of four crude bunks built into an unventilated cuddy in the forward hold.

"All right, boys. Let's go," Kelly said.

They didn't answer. He wondered if they were sulking. They might even refuse duty. He hoped not. There'd been enough trouble and delay.

He called again, "Rise and shine. Hit the deck."

When they didn't answer his second call he descended the ladder and struck a match. Rara and Kavi were not there. Their bunks hadn't been slept in.

Kelly went up on deck and walked into the main cabin without knocking. "Wake up, Hanson. We got trouble."

The only answer was the whisper of the wind in the rigging and the creaking of the anchor rope. In the brightening day, he could see that one of the bunks in here had been slept in but Hanson was not in the cabin.

He backed out of the door and strode aft. "You wouldn't happen to know where the three others are, would you?" he asked Hines.

The old man worked whisky cotton out of his mouth as he stared at Kelly with blood-shot eyes. "What the hell are you talking about?"

Kelly repeated his question.

"I ain't got the least idea," Hines finally said. "Why?"

"They're gone."

"They're what?"

"They're gone, all of them. Did you hear anything in the night?"

"Not a bloody thing," Hines said. "Did you look in the galley?"

Kelly checked the small deck galley. Both the burners of the stove and the coffee pot were cold. He walked to the rail and looked down. The painter was dangling in the water. The small boat was gone. As the morning continued to brighten rapidly with the abruptness so typical of the tropics,

he looked at the island and could see the boat beached on the sand by the coral-edged path that led up to the shack.

Hines joined him. "Hmm. Looks like they've gone ashore."

"Why?"

Hines shook his head. "There you 'ave me. Especially together. They weren't exactly friendly when we turned in. I 'alf expected the boys to try to knife Sven in 'is sleep. And from the way he talked, Sven felt the same way."

Kelly reached over his head, caught a rope and pulled himself up on the rail.

"'Ere, now," Hines cautioned him. "Use your 'ead, Mr. Kelly. What do you think you're doing?"

Kelly studied the placid surface of the water between the sloop and the beach. "I'm going to swim ashore."

Hines caught at one of his ankles. "Don't be a blooming fool. You don't know these waters. I do. And I know the bloody stuff's filthy with sharks. And they ain't 'ammer-'eads. They're tigers."

Kicking his foot free, Kelly poised and dived. When he came to the surface fear for Sylvia gave impetus to the powerful crawl that was propelling him toward the shore.

He doubted that Rara and Kavi were with Hanson. He was pretty sure, now that he'd time to think about it, that they hadn't spied on Sylvia and Janice. Hanson was something else. His voice had been thick and there'd been a sick look in his eyes when he'd accused Rara and Kavi of watching the girls in the pool.

Kelly had no trouble visualizing Hanson lying in the cabin formerly occupied by the two girls, staring hot-eyed into the night, smelling Sylvia's perfume, thinking, wondering, wanting, mentally violating her.

He'd been a fool to agree to allowing the two girls to sleep on shore. It had been Hanson's idea from the start. Hanson was the one who knew about the shack. He was the one who knew about the pool. The whole thing could have been part of a plan conceived in a warped and twisted mind.

The man was an egomaniac. He'd proven that by the way he'd allowed the command of the *Sally B* to go to his head. Sylvia was a continual source of frustration to him. She was rich and he was in her dead father's employ so he felt put upon at the same time he admired and wanted her body. He'd

said as much in the anteroom of the judge's chambers in Honolulu on the day of the inquest.

Kelly reached the beach and scrambled ashore. Under the trees, the morning was still gray. The clearing was ominously silent. The door of the shack was ajar. He snatched up the pinch bar Hines had dropped the night before and pushed the door all the way open. Then he walked through the outer room into the bedroom.

The small, low-ceilinged room was heavy with the deep sleep of early morning. The two girls were sleeping in separate beds. Their breathing was rhythmic and normal. Wearing a shortie gown, Sylvia was on her back with one arm raised over her head. Uncomfortable in the still heat, Janice had pushed the top sheet down to the foot of the bed but her shapely body was covered with a long silk nightgown.

As if sensing Kelly's presence, the blonde girl awakened and sat up. Pulling the sheet over her breasts in an instinctively feminine gesture, she asked,

"What's the big idea, Kelly?"

Kelly felt like a fool. He didn't know where to look. He didn't know what to do with his hands. He didn't know what to do with the bar he was gripping. He was suddenly acutely conscious that the only garment he was wearing was a pair of wet duck pants.

Janice picked her over-sized purse from the floor and opened it. "I asked you what the idea was, Kelly?"

Her voice woke up Sylvia, who sat up and said, "Now what? For heaven's sake, Matt, what are you doing here?"

Kelly said, lamely, "Hanson is missing."

Janice took a cigarette from the purse, then rummaged through it for her lighter. "I see," she said dryly. "And you thought he might be here." She found her lighter and touched it to the cigarette between her lips. "You thought one of us might be entertaining him. But under the circumstances, wouldn't that be—er—embarrassing?"

Sylvia studied Kelly's face. "I think you're serious, Matt."

"I am."

"What do you mean, Hanson is missing?"

"Just that."

"He isn't aboard the sloop?"

"No. Neither are Rara and Kavi."

Sylvia swung her feet to the floor and stood up in the narrow space between the two beds. "You'd better step out into the other room or on the porch while we dress."

Kelly walked out onto the porch and dropped the pinch bar in the sand. It was his own mind that was warped, he decided. There was probably a very logical explanation why the three men were missing. He'd just jumped to the worst conclusion due to his feeling for Sylvia. His mind worked that way, he said to himself. But, on the other hand, where was the big Swede? Why was the small boat beached on the sand? Where were Rara and Kavi?

Sylvia came out, wearing a two-piece play suit and carrying her sandals. She sat on the stoop next to Kelly and fitted the sandals to her feet. "Now, what's all this about?"

Kelly told her the truth. "When I woke up Hanson wasn't in the cabin. Then I saw the small boat beached here by the path and I thought—"

Sylvia finished the sentence for him. "You thought he'd come here."
"Yes."

She laid her hand on his arm and her look was almost tender. "Thank you." Kelly enjoyed the feel of her soft hand and the look in her eyes. Then she withdrew both very suddenly, as if she was sorry she'd made the gesture. "But if the boat is on the beach, how did you get ashore?"

"I swam."

"But couldn't that have been dangerous?"

"I suppose so."

"But you were worried about me?"

"I was."

Her voice was barely audible. "Even after Pago Pago?"

"Yes."

There was so much Kelly wanted to tell her, so much he wanted to explain. Before he could even begin, Janice joined them on the porch. She'd slipped into a backless, strapless sundress. As she spoke, she twisted a ribbon around her back hair to form an uncombed pony tail.

"Now, what's this about Hanson and Rara and Kavi?"

Sylvia said, "Matt says when he woke up this morning they were gone."

"Gone where?"

"He doesn't know."

Janice finished fastening her hair. "Have you looked anywhere but here?"

"Where is there to look?"

"I mean around the island."

"Oh. No, I haven't."

"Have you called them?"

Kelly cupped his hands to his mouth and called, "Ahoy there! Hanson—Rara—Kavi! If you can hear me, sing out."

Only echoes of his own voice answered him.

"I don't know what to think," Janice said.

She was carrying the same purse she'd had in the bedroom. She opened it to fish for her cigarettes and before she closed it, Kelly glimpsed the well-worn butt of a large-calibered revolver. It was just another thing to wonder about. Revolvers weren't exactly standard newspaper reporters' equipment.

She offered him the package of cigarettes. "You're leveling with us, Matt?"

"I am."

"Then tell us this. Was there some trouble between you and Hanson and the two natives last night?"

"How did you know that?"

Sylvia answered before Janice had a chance. "We thought we heard you quarreling when we came down from the pool. But when no one said anything about it, we didn't, either."

"Yes," Kelly said. "There was trouble. Hanson knocked Rara down and kicked him. Then I had to grab Kavi before he knifed Hanson."

"What was the quarrel about?"

"You and Janice. Hanson accused Rara and Kavi of spying on you while you bathed. From the way he phrased his accusation and his knowledge of details, I figure he did a little looking himself. That's why I headed for here when I woke up and found him gone."

"I see," Janice was thoughtful. "So what do we do now?"

Kelly got to his feet. "Search the island, I suppose. I'll get right on it."

"And leave us here alone. No, thank you." Janice went to the door of the shack. "We'll go with you. As soon as I put on some shoes."

Sylvia filled her lungs with air, then exhaled audibly. "Damn being a woman to hell. It gets a girl into the rottenest messes."

Chapter 14

HINES WAS WAITING by the rope ladder dangling over the side of the sloop. He helped Janice and Sylvia aboard, then leaned over the rail and asked Kelly:

“You didn’t find Sven then?”

Kelly secured the small boat with the painter. “That would seem to be obvious.”

Kelly scrambled up the ladder and over the rail.

He put on his T-shirt and cap and a pair of sun glasses. He felt much more comfortable now.

The girls had gone forward and were peering into the cuddy where Rara and Kavi had slept. Hines made certain they couldn’t hear him by lowering his voice as he confided, “And you ain’t ’eard the ’alf of it.”

“Now what?” Kelly asked.

The old man said, “While you were ashore, I checked the supplies. The boys from Samoa must ’ave looted the storeroom before they skipped. A fair three-fourths of our tinned goods is gone.”

“You’re sure?”

“I’m positive.”

“Did you check the gun locker?”

“No. I didn’t think of that.”

Kelly crossed the deck to the cabin. It still smelled of Sylvia’s perfume and the suntan lotion that she and Janice used. The padlock on the gun locker was intact but the hinges had been unscrewed and the door was dangling by its hasp. The two heavy-calibered rifles that they had brought along as protection against sharks attacking him when he was surfacing were gone. So were the two Colt automatics.

He thumbed a cigarette into his mouth and spat it out without lighting it. This latest development didn’t make sense. It seemed incredible that the locker could have been forced with Hanson in the cabin. Nor had Hanson any reason to force it. He carried the only key to it on his key chain.

“Let’s not tell the girls right now,” Kelly suggested.

“Whatever you say,” Hines agreed. “With Sven missing, I guess that sort of makes you skipper.”

Out on deck again, Kelly slipped a belaying pin from the rack and walked back to the ladder. "All right," he called. "Let's go."

Sylvia looked at the weapon of sorts he was gripping. "What are you doing with that?"

"I don't know," Kelly told her. "Maybe hit someone if I can get close enough."

They were all silent until after he'd beached the boat. Then, as they waded through the loose sand, Sylvia looked down at her sandals, ruefully.

"If we're going to do much walking, I'd better put on some shoes with toes in them."

"We'll wait for you," Kelly said.

He walked back to the small boat and sat on the gunwale and shaded his eyes with his hands as he tried to see the far end of the lagoon. Hines went down the beach, thrashing at the tangles of creepers with a stick and peering behind trees and bushes. Janice watched Sylvia go up the path, then sat next to Kelly and looked expectantly at him.

"See anything?"

Kelly shook his head. "No. It's as if the three of them disappeared into thin air."

She seemed to be trying to reach a decision. Finally she said, "Far be it from me to pry into anyone's personal life but under the circumstances, I think I'm justified."

Kelly glanced sideways at her. "What are you getting at?"

"Did you come ashore last night after you rowed out to the sloop?"

"No, I didn't. Why?"

"Someone did."

"Who?"

"I don't know. But Sylvia isn't telling all she knows."

"How do you know that?"

Janice reached down and trailed her fingers in the water. "Because I woke up during the night. Don't ask me what time it was. I don't know. But it was some time after midnight. And Sylvia wasn't in her bed. Naturally, I was worried. I started to get up. Then I decided not to."

"Why?"

"Because I heard her out in the clearing."

"Heard Sylvia? What was she doing in the clearing at that time of night?"

“Talking to a man.”

“Hanson.”

“At the time I thought it was you.”

“Well, it wasn’t.”

“Then it was Hanson.”

“It must have been. What were they talking about?”

“I couldn’t distinguish the words. I could hardly hear their voices. But they seemed to be quarreling about something. I heard Sylvia say ‘no’ several times.” Janice looked away. “Then there was a rather long silence. Shortly after that, Sylvia came back and got into bed. She was crying.”

Kelly felt sick to his stomach. He wished, in a way, that Janice hadn’t told him. He knew it wouldn’t do any good to question Sylvia. She’d merely look at him wide-eyed and deny it.

Hines came back to where they were sitting. “I say,” he said. “It’s gone.”

“What’s gone?” Kelly asked him.

Hines pointed to a long drag mark on the sand. His tone suggested that Kelly was slightly moronic. “That old canoe. One of us should ’ave noticed it right off. That beat-up native canoe that was ’ere on the beach is gone.”

Kelly stood up and examined the drag mark in the sand. There was a deep furrow ploughed from where the canoe had lain down to the edge of the water. He took off his cap and fanned his face. “Well, that takes care of Rara and Kavi.”

Janice asked him what he meant.

He told her. “They got a belly full of Hanson’s abuse and took off with most of our supplies, two rifles and a pair of Colts, in lieu of the wages due them.”

“You mean the gun locker on the sloop was broken into?”

Kelly put his cap back on. “You girls had to know sooner or later.”

“How ducky. How perfectly ducky.”

Hines was dubious. “Oh, I don’t know. True, the canoe is gone. But in the condition it was in, I’ll be damned if I’d ’ave put to sea in ’er.”

“I’ve seen natives go a long way in worse,” Kelly told him.

“Remember, they know these waters. They may try to get to another atoll.” He shielded his eyes with his hand and studied the smaller islets that dotted the barrier reef enclosing the silent lagoon. “Or they may still be hiding on this one.”

Janice chose to be facetious. “How nice. Armed with a rifle and a revolver apiece and three-fourths of our supplies or more. But that still doesn’t tell us where the captain is or what’s happened to him. For all we know—”

She stopped talking as Sylvia screamed. Another scream followed, echoing and re-echoing across the quiet lagoon. With Janice and Hines close behind him, Kelly raced up the path toward the shack.

Sylvia was standing in front of the porch. Her face was distorted with fear as she pointed at a thick clump of young papaya trees forcing their way up through the thick tangle of sweet potato vines encroaching on the clearing.

“In there. In there,” she screamed.

“What’s in there?” Kelly demanded.

“I don’t know,” she told him. “I didn’t see it very well. But it looked like a man crawling.”

Kelly picked up a piece of coral and tossed it at the clump of trees. Then when nothing moved or cried out, he gripped the belaying pin he brought with him and motioned to the rest to stand back. Cautiously approaching the creepers, he kicked the young trees and vines aside.

The moving object Sylvia had seen was Hanson. The big blond man was barely conscious. His face and his torn shirt were matted with clotted blood. His efforts to force his way through the vines that had caught at his legs and tripped him were causing fresh blood to ooze from a nasty-looking knife wound in his back.

Kelly knelt beside him and cut the vines away with a clasp knife that Hines handed him. “Take it easy, fellow. You’re all right now.” He lifted the wounded man to a sitting position. “Who did it?”

Hanson’s mouth opened. His lips moved with obvious effort but made no sound. Then his eyes closed and his head fell back on Kelly’s arm.

“Who did it?” Kelly repeated.

Hines squatted beside him and took his knife and closed it, putting it in his pocket. “You’re wasting your time. The poor devil was just ’anging on by ’is nerve. And now ’e knows ’e’s among friends, ’e’s passed out. It’s plain to see what’s ’appened.”

“What?” Kelly asked him.

Hines made a gesture of impatience. “Use your ’ead, man. Sven probably ’eard Rara and Kavi take off and followed them in the boat to try

to stop them. And when 'e caught up with them on the beach, one of the bloody beggars stuck 'is knife in Sven's back."

Kelly thought it was a logical explanation except for several confusing factors. How had the two natives swum ashore, burdened with the canned goods and the guns? How had they taken the guns out of the locker without Hanson hearing them? Why had Hanson followed them by himself? And if he caught up with them on the lagoon side of the island, why had he been coming from the outer beach when he'd become entangled in the vines?

Still holding Hanson in his arms, Kelly looked at Sylvia. If Janice was telling the truth, Sylvia knew more about the whole thing than she was telling.

Kelly's cheeks felt hot as he recalled Janice's words. His breathing became shallow as he envisioned what might have happened between Hanson and Sylvia. It was all beginning to take on the appearance of a giant jig-saw puzzle with each new piece being rammed into place without forming any clue to the finished picture. He felt, too, as though an invisible web was slowly closing in on him.

Janice broke the uneasy silence. "Well, let's not just stand here and watch him die. We'd better get him into the shack and stop that bleeding if we can."

Sylvia wet her lips with the tip of her tongue as she moved her eyes over the unconscious man on her bed.

"Is—is he going to live?"

"Let's put it this way, Miss Ryan, Hines said earnestly. "'E'd better."

"Why?" Janice asked.

Hines told her. "Because if 'e doesn't, we're all in a pretty pickle. We're God knows 'ow many miles from nowhere and low on supplies to boot. And Sven is the only one of us who can navigate or 'andle the *Sally B.*"

Chapter 15

THE DISCOVERY was accidental. It resulted partly from boredom but mainly from a desire of Kelly's to learn how to handle the sloop under sail in the event that Hanson died. Being a practical man and thinking of his twenty per cent of the salvage, he worked on tacking and luffing, raising and lowering the sails while he dragged the sweep from the stern of the ship.

It happened late in the afternoon during the last day of the second week of Hanson's convalescence. Kelly and Hines were alone on the sloop. A few rain clouds appeared on the horizon but the trade wind continued constant. Except for gentle swells rolling shoreward the open sea was as calm as the glassy surface of the mile-distant lagoon.

With Hines' help, Kelly had already reefed the sails and was preparing to start the diesel when the improvised grappling hook on the end of the sweep caught and the sloop came up short, then described a wide, yawing half-circle as the hook continued to hold.

Kelly consulted the chart. He wasn't a navigator. He didn't know how to use a sextant or take a sight. He had no way of pinpointing the exact latitudinal and longitudinal fix the radio operators of the British destroyer en route to Apia and the United States Hydrographical ship had taken the night the Sea Witch had foundered. He did know they were in the general locale of the wreck and that according to the chart the bottom here was supposed to be free of all natural obstructions.

He pointed that fact out to Hines. "It could be we're fast to the Witch."

Hines took a dim view of the matter. "Could be but I doubt it. We must be at least three leagues from the spot Sven marked on the chart. And we're much too close to shore. On the night the Witch went down it took me a 'ell a of a time to wash in. I' was more drowned than alive." Kelly refused to be discouraged. It was the first major strike he'd made. The prevailing current was easterly. It could have moved the sloop along the bottom, closer to the atoll. With Hines protesting the extra work involved, he warped the *Sally B* directly over the object which the hook was holding and fastened the taut sweep to two can buoys. It was wet, hard, dangerous work for two men.

When they'd finished, Hines studied the bobbing can buoys without interest. "So we may be 'ooked to the Witch. What do we do now?"

Kelly wiped sweat and salt water from his eyes, then tried to dry his cracked hands on his dungarees. "Tell the others, I suppose. It's up to Hanson to decide what we do now."

"If Sven says dive, you're still willing to go down?"

"I am. Remember I'm working on per diem basis plus percentage. And twenty per cent of one hundred thousand dollars is a lot of money."

"True," the old man admitted. "It's a 'ell of a lot of money." He protested, "But after all that's 'appened, with us being as short 'anded as we are—"

Kelly shrugged. "All right. I know the conditions for diving aren't the way I'd like them to be. But you can handle the lines and now that he's back on his feet again, the captain's bad shoulder won't keep him from running the compressor or the underwater phone. Frankly, I'd rather dive with you two as tenders than with my life depending on two surly natives."

Easing the throttle forward, Kelly sighed. He was tired. He was wet and he was hungry. He felt better than he had at any time since the first night he'd boarded the *Kailua*. He'd done what he'd started to do. He'd gotten the feel of the wheel of the sloop. He'd proven, at least to himself, that with Hanson plotting the course, he could sail the *Sally B* back to Pago Pago if he had to. Hooking the underwater object was lagniappe. It could prove to be the first decent break the expedition had received.

Hines was amused. "Feel pretty cocky, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," Kelly answered.

"Don't be," Hines said. "Stink-potting in a calm, off-shore only a mile, with a bloody lagoon 'andy to put into in case a line squall should come up, ain't like running for Pago Pago under full sail with the sea sweeping over the deck and the blooming deck bucking like a two-dollar whore trying to please a ten-dollar customer."

Kelly laughed. "No, it isn't."

He negotiated the narrow passage through the reef and cruised into the lee of the island. Anchoring the sloop in the lagoon without incident, he noticed Hanson was not with the girls as they came down the path. He and Hines secured the boat and turned toward the girls.

"What luck?" Janice asked.

Hines shrugged as he waded ashore. "That I wouldn't know, miss. But Mr. Kelly seems to think we've 'ooked the Witch. It's a sure thing we've made the buoy fast to something."

Janice slapped-at a mosquito. "Fine. Now maybe we can do what we came to do and get off this God-forsaken island."

"Yeah," Kelly agreed with Janice. "That's about the way I feel."

Sylvia squatted on the sand in front of him and drew a design in the loose soil with a twig. "Don't do it, Matt," she whispered. "Don't dive."

Janice overheard their conversation and practically shouted. "For God's sake, why shouldn't he?"

Sylvia said as hotly, "Because without experienced tenders, he'll be risking his life needlessly, that's why! But you don't care about that. All you give a damn about is getting a good dirty story for your lousy newspaper."

Sylvia was still a puzzle to Kelly. He doubted that he would ever understand her. She was too mercurial. On the morning he'd swum ashore, she'd seemed genuinely grateful. He'd felt closer to her than at any time since the night in his suite. She'd even seemed to understand and forgive what he'd done to her in Pago Pago. Then with Hanson wounded and in her bed, if not at the same time she was in it, she'd done a complete turn-around. She deliberately avoided being alone with him. Now she was changed again. She seemed concerned.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Sylvia," Janice said. "Don't be such a fool. Deep-sea diving is Matt's business. He knew what he was getting into when he took the contract."

Sylvia started to answer her and changed her mind. She looked up and lapsed into a sullen silence as she saw Hanson coming down the path.

During his enforced two weeks of quiet, lying on one of the beds in the shack or in a hammock hung in the shade out in the clearing, most of the tan had faded from Hanson's face. This was his second day up and he was a little unsteady.

He sat on the log beside Kelly. "How did it go?"

"Just fine."

"I saw you coming through the pass. You're beginning to handle the sloop like an expert."

"Under power."

Hines told him before Kelly could. "We think we may 'ave good news, Sven."

"What sort of good news?"

"Mr. Kelly thinks 'e's 'ooked the Witch."

Hanson turned to Kelly. "What does the old man mean, you think you've hooked her?"

Kelly shrugged. "Just that. We have no way of knowing and will never know unless I go down." He'd brought the chart ashore. He spread it on the sand in front of the log and using the twig Sylvia had used he pointed to a spot on it some distance from the circled cross Hanson had drawn to mark the approximate location of the yacht. "We're fast to something there."

Hanson studied the chart. "For a minute you had me hopeful. But the chances are it isn't the Witch. Even allowing for the easterly current, I doubt if she'd have drifted that far. A shame."

Janice joined the group around the chart. "You mean you're going to kiss it off, just like that? Without even trying to determine if it is the Witch?"

Hanson smiled at her. "I hate to, believe me, Miss Hart. When we go back empty-handed, when they find out what a mess I've made of this expedition, I'll be washed up with the Ryan estate. I'll be lucky to sign on as a deck hand on a tuna boat." He shrugged and shook his head. "But right now I'm responsible for the safety of everyone here. And with the weather closing in on us and the possibility of a blow any minute, I still think the best, thing we can do is call the whole thing off for now and take a chance on getting back to Pago Pago."

"So do I," Sylvia said.

"I'll buy that," Hines agreed.

"All right," Janice said. "Even if Matt wants to go down, we seem to be out-voted. But here's something for you to think about. When we get back to Los Angeles I'm going to write a story that is going to burn someone's ears. It may just burn them period."

Hanson shifted his weight on the log. "Just what do you mean by that?"

Janice told him. "I mean there's something stinking going on. For some reason most treasure and salvage expeditions seem to run to bad luck. But this one has had more than its share. There have been too many, shall we say, incidents."

Hanson felt of his wounded shoulder. "You may have something there, Miss Hart."

"IT know damn well I have," Janice said. "And when I get back to the States I'm going straight to the District Attorney's office and demand that a thorough investigation is made of everyone concerned with this expedition. You, Hines, Miss Ryan, Mr. Harris, even Kelly. I don't know why but I've had a feeling for some time that this whole thing is a razzle dazzle, that for some reason, someone doesn't want the strong box recovered from the Witch."

For a moment Kelly thought Sylvia was going to strike Janice. "You must be out of your mind."

"Must I?"

Sylvia looked at Hanson. "Don't pay any attention to her, Sven. All she wants is a sensational story for her filthy sheet. And after all, I am a Ryan and that's my father's yacht out there."

Janice smiled sweetly. "Pardon me. Your stepfather's yacht."

"Stepfather, then," Sylvia said. "I think Sven is right. I think we ought to call the expedition off for this year and get back to Pago Pago before we're caught in the monsoon season."

Hanson studied the sky thoughtfully. "Now wait a minute. We've all had a rough time of it. But let's not lose our heads. As I understood Mr. Harris in Honolulu, the only reason he allowed Miss Hart and poor Phillips to accompany us was to offset any possible bad publicity caused by our remote connection with that nasty business on the pier and aboard the *Kailua*. And as there has been another death since then, not forgetting to mention a knife stuck in me, Miss Hart could write quite a story. So, perhaps she's right."

"What do you mean by that?" Sylvia asked.

"I think, having come this far, we ought to let Kelly make a dive or two to find out if he has buoyed the Witch."

"No," Sylvia said, "I won't permit it."

Hanson was short with her. "Look, Miss Ryan, I know I'm just a hired hand. And when we get back to the mainland, you can have me fired. But here, on this atoll, I'm captain."

He squatted on the sand and studied the chart. "So maybe I'm wrong. Maybe the Witch has shifted. Maybe the original cross triangulation was off

a few degrees. That's a lot of ocean out there." He looked up at Janice. "Tell me one thing, Miss Hart."

"What's that?"

"Do you trust Kelly?"

Janice thought a moment. "Yes."

"Good. Now do you think your editor would be satisfied if Kelly goes down tomorrow and, if he has located the Witch, does his best to locate and get the papers and the money out of the safe in the captain's cabin?"

"I—think so."

"Don't think. Be sure."

"I'm sure."

"That settles it, then," Hanson said. "We'll go out on the *Sally B* tomorrow and find out what Hines and Kelly have snagged. You are willing to dive, Kelly?"

"That's what I'm here for."

"Good." Hanson pushed his cap to the back of his head. "But let's get one thing straight right now. That damned Witch almost drowned me once. I don't want to give her a second chance. So, if you find out you haven't buoyed the Witch, or if you find out you have and it's going to take you too long to get into the cabin—"

"Yes?"

Hanson looked back at the sky. "Well, we're still five days from Pago Pago. And if we're smart, we'll get back there as fast as we can."

Chapter 16

THE SURFACE WATER was warm but it became colder as Kelly slid down the heavily weighted shot-line he'd rigged the length of the sloop away from the buoyed sweep cable.

The weighted shot-line was an afterthought. It was dangerous enough working with inexperienced tenders without taking a chance on becoming entangled in the wreckage of whatever the buoyed sweep was holding.

As he descended the line he expertly adjusted the flow of air into his diving dress to compensate for the increasing pressure on his body. One "squeeze" was all it took. He hoped Hanson and Hines remembered the instructions he'd given them. He'd made them simple.

The bottom was solid sand. Visibility remained good but there was a thick clump of seaweed ten to fourteen feet high between him and the object he was seeking. Kelly shuffled across the sand, cutting a path through the weeds with his sheath knife.

There was no doubt about what he'd hooked. The Sea Witch was lying on her side in an undersea amphitheater, the walls of which were formed by more weeds. Two years of submersion had made a ghost ship of the yacht. Her once trim hull and superstructure were badly encrusted with marine growth. Her boat davits and her boats were gone. The storms had torn away part of her bridge but her main deck appeared to be in fair condition. When he'd once located it, the captain's cabin should prove not too difficult to enter.

He put back his knife and talked into the phone in his helmet. "Take me up a few feet but go easy."

Aided by the strain on his lines and buoyancy of the water, he walked up the side of the yacht, being careful not to snag the lines coiling above him or to get his diving dress caught on the razor-sharp barnacles and splintered wreckage protruding from the yacht.

The undersea phone made Hanson's voice sound thin. "Well, don't keep us in suspense. Sing out. Is or isn't it the Witch?"

Kelly turned his head slightly in his helmet and spoke into his transmitter. "It's the Witch. I'm on her now. Just aft of the wheel."

"What condition is she in?"

“I’d say fair.”

“Good,” Hanson said. His voice was even thinner as Kelly heard him tell the others on deck, “It’s the Sea Witch. Kelly’s on her now.”

According to the blueprint of the yacht, the cabin was forward of the wheel. Due to the position in which the yacht was lying the deck was tilted some. Clinging to what was left of the rail and being sure to keep his lines from fouling, Kelly worked his way forward and rubbed his glove across a small brass nameplate on the first door he reached. With his face plate close to the metal he could distinguish the legend. It was the door he wanted.

He tried to open the door but it wouldn’t budge. The pressure of the water was too great. Due to the tilt of the deck he had to work with one hand and hold on with the other.

One hundred and eighty feet above him, Hanson asked, “What gives?” A silence. Then, “What are you doing now?”

“Trying to get into the cabin,” Kelly said.

He took a small pinch bar from his tool belt and pried off the wooden jamb of the door. Then he tried to force the hinges but the wood was still sound. The screws held. He exchanged tools and unscrewed them. It was difficult working with gloves so he took them off.

It took him longer than he cared to spend. When the hinges finally came loose, he pushed open the door with his bar and the buoyant wood floated up out of sight. A huge swarm of crabs and two small octopi scuttled up out of the cabin.

The interior was dark. It was like sitting on the side of a well. Kelly turned on his submarine lamp and shined it down into the cabin. As far as he could tell, the bed and desk and other furniture were still bolted solidly in place. Then he saw the safe, apparently just as secure as the other things.

“I see the safe,” he informed those above him.

Kelly felt smug. One hundred thousand dollars, twenty per cent of it, anyway. On his first dive.

He started to lower himself into the cabin to unbolt the safe when the air entering his helmet stopped. The compressor was no longer hammering air down to him.

Kelly sat back on the edge of the hole he’d made and resisted an impulse to panic. “What the hell’s going on up there?”

There was no answer. The flow of air did not come back. Kelly reached up and yanked his line. There was no answering tug. Something

was wrong on deck. With him at thirty fathoms.

Kelly damned himself for a fool. The dive had been his own idea. He'd wanted his cut of the salvage. He'd wanted to prove he wasn't frightened. But no amount of money was worth being squeezed to death. He was seared. He had only a few seconds.

He felt the intake valve of his helmet. It seemed to be in order. Fortunately it was a non-return valve. Otherwise as soon as the pump had stopped the compressed air in his helmet would have rushed up the air hose. To conserve what air he did have, he shut off the outlet valve as he debated his chance of being able to climb the sweep cable directly above him. Kelly decided his chances were slim. He'd never make it up.

He yanked at his line again and called at the same time. "God almighty, get that air going!"

The rhythmic pf-pf, pf-pf, pf-pf of air resumed with a rush and Kelly was forced to adjust the outlet valve in a hurry to keep his diving dress from becoming overinflated and blowing him to the surface. He'd seen other divers 'blow.' Hanson came back on the phone. "I'm sorry."

"What happened?" Kelly demanded.

"I'm sorry," Hanson repeated.

The cold sweat that had formed on Kelly's face trickled into his mouth and gagged him. He used the spit valve.

Hanson was sorry.

The whole episode had taken only a few seconds. Kelly was damned if he would descend the few feet into the cabin and spend the few more seconds it would take to unbolt the safe from the deck and bend a sling or cable on it. He suddenly didn't care how much money was in it or how valuable its papers might be to the Ryan estate. What had happened once could happen again. If Mr. Harris wanted the papers, let him come down and get them.

"Do you want us to send down a sling?" Hanson asked.

Kelly got to his feet with an effort. "No."

He moved cautiously over the smashed superstructure until he came to the sweep line. The improvised grappling hook was securely imbedded in the wreckage. Both it and the cable would hold. He gripped the cable and spoke into his phone.

"Stand by to heave. I'm coming up the sweep line. Pull me up fifty feet and wait five minutes. Then heave me ten more feet and wait fifteen

minutes. Just follow that table I gave you.”

“Aye,” Hanson said over the phone. “But what about the safe?”

Kelly temporized, “I’ll get it the next time I come down.”

“Did you get it open?”

“No.”

Kelly wrapped his legs around the sweep line and over-inflated his suit enough to make him buoyant and began his slow ascent. Some other diver could have his percentage of the cash in the yacht’s safe. He’d had it. He no longer wanted any part of the Witch.

At the sixty-foot level, a broken wire in the steel cable ripped a two-inch gash in the thigh of his suit and Kelly felt water rush in up to his waist, then slowly creep up around his chest. It was uncomfortable but not dangerous. The pressure in his helmet would keep it from coming high enough to drown him.

Since his dive had been of relatively short duration, at fifty feet he took a chance and told Hines to pull him up, cutting his waiting time short. Due to the rip in his suit he’d lost most of his buoyancy but Hanson and Hines finally managed to pull him over the rail and onto the deck of the *Sally B*.

Between them they led him to a bench and sat him down. Hines unscrewed the face plate and Janice put her face to the opening.

“Are you all right, Matt?”

Kelly’s arms and legs felt numb. The change in pressure seemed to be trying to split his guts open. His skull felt as if it was being crushed between a pair of gigantic tongs. He hoped he didn’t come down with the bends. Then he filled his lungs with unpressurized air and felt better.

“Yeah. Sure. I’m all right. I think.”

The sea water running from his suit formed a pool around the bench. Hines was fumbling with the breast plate. Now he was removing his helmet. Kelly thought at first the swaying motion was a product of the change in pressure. Then he discovered that while he’d been below, conditions had changed. The wind had freshened considerably. A nasty chop had replaced the gentle rollers. The clouds in the sky were yellow.

Kelly looked from the sky to Sylvia. When she saw him looking at her, she wet her lips with the tip of her tongue and looked away.

Hanson seemed almost amused about something as he said, “It’s a good thing you came up when you did. The old man was having trouble

fishing your lines.”

“What happened to the compressor?” Kelly said.

Hanson continued to be amused. “Let’s just say I was momentarily distracted.”

An embarrassed silence followed.

Hanson broke it by ordering Hines to finish undressing Kelly while he broke out the hook and got the sloop under way. Sylvia went with him.

No one seemed to give a damn about the safe or in what condition he’d found the Witch.

Janice put her cigarette between Kelly’s lips. “Don’t look at me,” she said with a grimace. “If I hadn’t seen what was happening and yelled at Hanson to get the compressor going, you’d probably be dead.”

A sudden gust of wind carrying rain drenched the deck. Kelly took off his red diver’s cap and wiped his face with it.

“What was happening?”

She looked over her shoulder and shrugged. “That should give you a fair idea.”

Kelly turned on the bench to see what she saw. Suddenly, his breath felt as tight as it had at thirty fathoms without air.

Hanson had one hand on the wheel and was using the other to fondle Sylvia. As Kelly watched them they kissed and Hanson’s free hand grew bolder.

“See what I mean?” Janice asked.

Chapter 17

THE EVENING MEAL was a dreary affair. Shortly after it was over the force of the wind increased to almost monsoon velocity. Blown objects thudded continuously against the tin roof. Between them and the drum of the rain added to the roar of the breakers, conversation was impossible, except when there was a lull in the storm.

It was all right with Kelly. After what had happened that afternoon, he had nothing to say. As far as he was concerned the expedition was over. All he wanted now was to get back to Pago Pago and from Pago Pago to Los Angeles, as soon as possible.

He studied the others in the room. Smoke curling up from one of the continuous chain of cigarettes she smoked, Janice was working a crossword puzzle in a yellowed newspaper she'd found on a shelf. Hines was drunk and getting more so. Hanson didn't care. He had something more to his liking to interest him than Hines' sobriety. Wherever Sylvia went, Hanson's eyes followed her. Whenever he could do so without being too obvious he patted or touched her as she passed him. For her part, Sylvia's eyes were too bright, her voice was too shrill. She laughed at nothing and seemed to be on the border of hysteria. Kelly almost wished that they would go into the bedroom and finish what they'd started.

He was honest with himself. He didn't wish that at all. He hoped it didn't happen. Picturing Sylvia with Hanson was just a form of mental flagellation. Until he'd seen her act as she was acting he hadn't realized the extent or depth of his feeling for her. It was like watching something fragile and very beautiful die.

During a brief lull, he walked out on the porch to study the sky and Hanson came out and stood beside him. "It doesn't look so good, does it?"

"No," Kelly coldly agreed with him. "It doesn't."

Hanson kept his eyes on the wet yellow sky. "It may be only a short squall. But I don't like the color of that sky." After a moment of silence, he said, "About this afternoon, Kelly—"

Kelly started to turn away. "Forget it, Hanson."

"Okay," Hanson said. "I will. But tell me something, will you, Kelly?"

"What?"

“How did you find things on the Witch?”

Kelly turned again to look at the captain, with a sharp retort ready, then realized that this was the first real opportunity they’d had to talk since he’d completed his dive. The storm had broken so suddenly that Hanson had had his hands full getting the *Sally B* back into the lagoon and securing her. Then the noise of the wind had prevented any effort at conversation.

“Not bad,” Kelly said. “I’d say good.”

“You say you saw the safe?”

“I was within ten feet of it.”

“You opened it?”

Kelly wondered where the questions were leading. “No.”

Hanson thought a moment. “Of all the lousy luck. Look. What if this storm is just an isolated blow?”

“What do you mean by that?”

The lull, for the moment, was complete, like the still eye of a hurricane. Hanson was able to light a cigarette without cupping his hands around the match. “I—just wondered,” he said through the flame. “In that case, I suppose, having come as close as you did, you’ll insist on going down again before we take off for Pago Pago?”

Kelly started to tell him that he wouldn’t go down again for all the money in the Ryan estate and refrained as he realized Sylvia was standing in the doorway listening.

A growing maggot of suspicion gnawed at Kelly’s mind. He wondered if it was possible, just possible, that there was something in the safe that the heiress didn’t want brought to the surface. A new will, for instance. That would explain a lot of things like Mr. Harris’ insistence that he was working for the estate, Sylvia’s attempt to discharge him in Pago Pago, her newly conceived passion for Hanson.

He felt the same fierce desire to hurt her as he’d felt on the night of the unfortunate affair in Pago Pago. He had no intention of diving again but it wouldn’t hurt her to worry a little.

“Why, of course,” he told Hanson. “If this is just a line squall and it clears up tomorrow, I insist on going down again. And if anyone tries to stop me, I’ll be inclined to think Miss Hart is right—that someone doesn’t want me to salvage the strong box.”

The wind was beginning to rise again. “I see,” Hanson said, softly. “I see.”

The returning wind brought rain with it. Hanson turned and went into the shack. Kelly stood on the porch and enjoyed the feel of the cold rain on his face. He'd waited thirty-three years to fall in love. Then it had to be with a girl like Sylvia. He sensed movement behind him and turned. Janice had joined him. She had to shout to make herself heard.

"Hanson says if the weather clears you're going to dive again!"

Kelly continued to lie. "That's right."

"You're crazy if you do. I never saw anything like it."

"Like what?"

The wind whipped her words away. She put her mouth to Kelly's ear and he could feel her wet lips move, "The way she acted when you phoned up and said you could see the safe. It was the rawest thing I ever saw. She deliberately pressed herself against Hanson and squeezed him. Then she took one of his hands and slipped it up under her shorts and they kissed. And Hanson got so excited I thought they were going to, right there on the deck."

Kelly wished Janice hadn't told him. He fought down a desire to be sick. He wanted to be alone. He had to be alone for a few minutes. He stepped off the porch and Janice shouted after him.

"Matt. You can't go out in a storm like this. That's crazy !"

Kelly walked on without bothering to shout back. The wind was so strong he had to bend double to walk. The night was filled with particles of blown coral and sand, with hurtling fronds whipped from the palms. When he reached the outer beach the long, broad froth of angry surf looked like an up-ended Niagara. The roar and pound and suck and surge of the frenzied breakers matched his mood perfectly.

The story Janice had told him was in keeping with the rest of the expedition. But why, after treating the man like dirt all the way from Los Angeles, had Sylvia chosen that particular moment to develop an irresistible yen for Hanson? There was only one answer. Looking back, Kelly could see that everything that had happened had been a form of delaying action. If Sylvia hadn't distracted Hanson when she had, the chances were the safe would be on board the *Sally B* right now. It seemed obvious there was something in it that Sylvia didn't want brought to the surface. She'd said so in as many words. It hadn't been entirely anger and hurt pride that night in Pago Pago when she'd told him:

It doesn't matter. Nothing matters now. Go ahead and dive. And the first time you go down, I hope someone cuts your air hose.

And she'd done exactly that—at least she'd tried to bring it about.

Kelly rounded the weather point of the island and came into the lee. The beach was littered with debris but the wind wasn't quite as strong on this side. The hill and trees broke some of the force of the storm.

He summed up the situation. The only thing he could do was go along for the ride, play it close to his belt until they got back to Pago Pago. If they got back to Pago Pago.

The water in the lagoon was higher than normal. With the waves breaking over the barrier reef the surface was no longer placid. The small boat that had been pulled up well over the regular high water mark was floating free. Kelly waded in water up to his chest to retrieve it, then stood shielding his eyes from the flying spume as he studied the *Sally B*. Even with all her canvas reefed the sloop was pitching wildly. It was difficult to tell, but she seemed farther out in the lagoon than she had been, as if she was dragging her anchor.

Kelly fought his way up the path to the shack and stood before it, hesitant to enter. There was a dim light in the lean-to. He thought he could smell boiling coffee. He wrenched the door open and stood dripping just inside the lean-to. Sylvia was standing at the stove. When she heard him she put down the coffee pot and came over to the door.

"I have to talk to you, Matt."

Kelly stood with his back to the door and looked at her. "About what?"

"Tomorrow."

"What about tomorrow?"

"Even if it clears up you mustn't dive again."

"Why not?"

I can't tell you."

"Sorry," Kelly said, coldly. "I'm working for the estate. I'm not taking my orders from you."

He started to move away from the door and Sylvia stepped in front of him and put her arms around his neck. She pressed her body against his as she pleaded:

"Please don't dive again, Matt," she almost sobbed. "You can have me if you don't."

It was a switch from the last few hours. From him to Hanson and back to him again. Kelly was bitterly amused. "In here? Standing up?"

"In here, Standing up. Out in the rain. Anywhere you want me."

"Just like that."

"Like that."

Kelly glanced over her head into the shack to see if they were being observed. They weren't. Janice was still working her puzzle. Hines was drinking from a pint bottle. His back to the opening into the lean-to, Hanson was sitting with his feet on one of the crude tables, studying the closed door of the shack. His attitude was one of watchful waiting.

"What about Hanson?" Kelly asked her.

Sylvia pressed even closer to him. "Leave Sven out of this, please. This is between us."

"It would be," Kelly admitted.

He knew Sylvia's motive. He was curious to find out how far she would go to get her own way. He pushed up her halter and caressed her. She made a low, moaning cry when he touched her. Her lips were feverish and eager. Her fingernails bit into the muscles of his back. She'd meant what she'd said. Even after he'd treated her as he had in Pago Pago, if he agreed not to dive again, she was willing to go all the way, standing up in the lean-to or sprawled in the wet mud outside with the storm beating at their straining bodies.

It wasn't a pretty picture. It disgusted Kelly. So did the girl in his arms. He'd thought Sylvia was something special, too. She wasn't. She was nothing but a rich little nympho with something to hide. He slapped the lips he'd just kissed, so hard that tears spurted from her eyes.

"Look, baby," Kelly told her coldly. "Knock it off. You don't have a thing every other babe hasn't got. And I don't want any part of it. I've had it."

He walked past her into the shack and turned and looked back. Sylvia was standing where he'd left her. Her eyes sullen and narrow, she returned his look for a moment. Then she tugged her halter into place and brushed at the hiked-up leg of her shorts and crossed to the stove and poured a cup of coffee.

Hanson glanced over his shoulder and lowered his feet to the floor. "Oh. You came the back way. I was beginning to worry about you."

Kelly squeegeed rain and salt water from his face and unbuttoned his wet shirt. "I just came up from the lagoon and the sloop looks like she's dragging her anchor."

Janice laid down her crossword puzzle. "So?"

Hanson got to his feet. "So we'd better do something about it. With our supplies as short as they are, if this thing turns into a real blow, and anything happens to the *Sally B*, we're sunk." He took his cap from a peg on the wall. "The old man and I better go down and secure her."

"I'll go with you if you want me to," Kelly offered.

Hanson shook his head. "That won't be necessary. Anything pertaining to the sloop is in my department." He fitted his cap to his head. "Besides, even if we haven't seen any sign of them, I still think Rara and Kavi are somewhere on the atoll. And with the weather building as it is, this being the highest point, when they get washed out where they are, they'll probably head for here. So one of us had better stay in the shack and keep his eyes on the girls."

"Whatever you say," Kelly agreed.

Hanson pulled Hines to his feet. "Come on, old man. You go with me." He took a step toward the door and stopped. "Oh, yes. I almost forgot."

Kelly was hanging up his shirt. He turned to see what Hanson had forgotten.

Sylvia was coming in from the lean-to, carrying a cup of hot coffee. Clumsily she gripped the saucer in both hands. Now, Kelly thought, I've seen it all. Sylvia Ryan waiting on Hanson.

"Here's the coffee you wanted," she said without any expression.

Hanson smiled smugly. "Thank you. Thank you very much, Miss Ryan." He drank the coffee slowly, seeming to savor every drop. When he'd finished he set the cup back on the table, still smiling and pushed Hines toward the door. "Okay, old man. Let's go. You heard what Kelly said. The sloop is dragging her anchor."

When they were gone there was no sound in the shack but the drum of rain on the roof and the howling frenzy of the wind. Her face completely blank, Sylvia stood a long while looking at the empty coffee cup. Then she deliberately brushed it from the table and walked into the unlighted bedroom.

Chapter 18

TOWARD MORNING the storm died. The sudden cessation of wind and rain and the thud of flying debris filled the shack with an uneasy silence, broken only by Hines' snoring. With the doors and shutters closed, the air in the small room was foul. Kelly got to his feet as quietly as he could and walked out on the porch.

The wind had torn off the thatched covering. The clearing was littered with fallen palm fronds and branches. Half-ripe fruit, torn from the breadfruit and papaya trees, were lying all over the ground. Otherwise, as far as Kelly could see, the storm hadn't done any major damage. Then he looked toward the lagoon and sucked in his breath. Unwilling to believe his eyes, he walked down the path to the beach. He'd been right. There was no doubt about it. The *Sally B* was gone.

He hurried back to the shack and shook Hanson awake.

"The sloop is gone."

Hanson came awake instantly. "What?"

"It's gone!"

Hanson got up from the make-shift bed on the floor and gripped the rail on the porch as he stared down the path toward the beach. "But it can't be," he protested. "The old man and I secured her fore and aft last night. A monsoon couldn't have blown her out of the lagoon." He snapped his fingers. "Rara and Kavi, by God. I knew they were still on the atoll."

He snatched a pair of sneakers from the floor and ran down the path.

Their voices had awakened Sylvia and Janice. The girls joined Kelly on the porch.

Janice asked, incredulous, "Did I hear you say the sloop is gone?"

"That's right," Kelly said.

"But it can't be," Sylvia said.

Kelly looked sideways at her. She wasn't pretty this morning. Her eyes were dull and slightly sunken. She looked frightened.

The other girl allowed her words to tumble out of her mouth. "Do you think it was Rara and Kavi? Do you think they're still around? Do you think they cut the sloop loose?"

“Look,” Kelly said. “This is as new to me as it is to you. I haven’t the least idea how it happened. All I know is if the sloop is gone, we’re stuck. We’ll probably be here for another month. Possibly longer. Whatever length of time it takes, the authorities in Pago Pago or the people handling the estate will eventually decide we’re in trouble and send out a search vessel.”

For some reason, the idea was unbearable to Sylvia. “Oh, no. That can’t be.”

“Why can’t it?” Janice asked.

Sylvia’s voice was lifeless. “I doubt that you would understand if I told you.”

Hanson came back up the path. “I didn’t trust those damn Samoans from the start.” He picked a piece of coral out of the sole of one of his sneakers. “But it can be they haven’t done as good a job of marooning us as they thought.”

“What do you mean by that?” Kelly asked.

Hanson told him. “Well, the small boat is still intact and while I can’t be certain I think I can see the sloop aground at the far end of the lagoon. If it is the sloop I saw and she isn’t too badly damaged, we may be able to make her seaworthy enough to raise Pago Pago.”

“Let’s hope,” Janice said, dryly.

Sylvia merely looked at Hanson. Watching her, Kelly thought if he hadn’t seen with his own eyes the way the girl had acted with Hanson the afternoon before, he could swear she hated and despised the man.

His feeling of confusion and unreality came back full force. In a puzzled voice he asked Hanson, “Why would Rara and Kavi want to keep us on the island?”

Hanson shook his head. “Frankly, I don’t know.” He looked at Sylvia. “On the other hand, natives are as unpredictable as women.”

Janice was practical. “So what do we do now?”

Hanson thought it over. “I’d say,” he said finally, “eat some breakfast. Then we’ll all row down to the other end of the lagoon and see if it is the *Sally B* I think I can see. If it is we’ll find out how badly she’s damaged.”

It was, Kelly thought, very pat and convenient. With the sloop in the condition she must be in, the recovery of the safe from the *Sea Witch* would be impossible at this time. After two years in the water the yacht would disintegrate rapidly from now on, being made of wood. By the time another storm season had passed and another salvage attempt was made, the odds

were that the Sea Witch would have broken up and the safe silted so deeply in the bottom of the sea that no other diver would ever find it.

“What are you thinking?” Hanson asked him.

“A lot of things,” Kelly admitted.

With only five of them in the small boat, it rowed and handled much better than it had on the first morning they’d come ashore.

Hines was fighting his usual hangover. Janice was lost in her thoughts. Kelly was grateful for one thing. As bad as their situation was, the loss of the *Sally B* seemed to have cured Sylvia of her infatuation for Hanson. For reasons best known to herself, she refused to even look at him.

On the other hand, Hanson was obnoxiously cheerful. The morning sun was hot. The waves still breaking over the reef created a small but nasty chop on the normally placid lagoon. Hanson insisted on doing all of the rowing.

By the time they were halfway there it was apparent that the object Hanson had spotted was the *Sally B*. She seemed to be heeled over a little and hard aground by the stern on one of the smaller islets.

It took them an hour to reach her. When they did, they couldn’t tell, just by looking at her, how badly she was damaged.

As Hanson made the small boat fast to the painter, Kelly stripped down to his strap and shorts and stood up. “I’ll tell you in a few minutes if we have a boat or not. If she isn’t too badly stove in, I think we can kedge her off.”

Sylvia was concerned. “What about sharks? The storm must have washed some up over the reef.”

Kelly gave her a crooked smile. “Well, thanks, Miss Ryan. I didn’t know you cared.”

Sylvia winced and looked away.

Hanson passed Kelly his sheath knife. “Here. You might need this.”

Kelly put the blade between his teeth and lowered himself cautiously over the side so as not to upset the boat and spill them all into the water. Once in the water, he upended and dove.

The storm and waves breaking over the reef had silted the lagoon badly. The usual crystal-like quality of the water was fouled with churned-

up particles of sand and coral and seaweed. Kelly wished he'd worn a pair of goggles. As he was, he practically had to feel his way.

He did feel his way along the submerged portion of the port hull. As far as he could tell, it seemed intact. He came up for air, then dived again and swam under the keel to examine the hull on the other side. The sloop was beached on sand but a sharp pinnacle of coral or something just as hard had torn a gaping hole through the double planking and the cargo hold was partially filled with water.

Light shone through from the deck. Kelly forced his way through the hole and came up inside the sloop. The water in the hold was less than three feet deep. It was enough. The *Sally B* was dead.

Kelly stood thigh deep in the water, filling his lungs with air. Judging from the sounds on the deck over his head, he figured the rest of the party had succeeded in boarding the vessel.

He started to call up to them and stopped as a chip floating on the surface of the water attracted his attention. He examined it closely, then stooped and looked at the hole in the hull again. The hole had been made from the inside, chopped and stove through with an axe.

It was breathless down here but Kelly felt a shiver go through him as he waded through the thigh-deep water and wrenched one of the storage cabinets open.

On the morning he'd awakened to find Hanson, Rara and Kavi missing, Hines had been concerned over the fact that the natives had taken three-fourths of the ship's supplies with them. He hadn't bothered to check. He'd taken the old man's word. Now he found that the supplies were all back in the locker from which they'd disappeared.

Kelly pried open a smaller locker next to the large one. It was stacked with unopened cases of whisky, twenty-four pints to the case. He started to close the door and a small leather object jammed in between one of the cases and the planking caught his eye. He reached back and speared it with his knife. It was the wallet of which he'd been robbed the first night aboard the *Kailua*. The fifteen one-hundred-dollar bills Sylvia had given him as an advance on his contract were still in the case but the once crisp money was damp and limp as if it had been handled and counted many times.

Kelly thrust the wallet in the waist band of his shorts and looked up at the open hatch through which the sunlight was streaming. Now he knew who, if not why, was responsible. Rara and Kavi hadn't jumped ship. The

chances were they were dead and had been for two weeks. He wished the knife in his hand was a gun, as he waded the water in the hold to the ladder and climbed the ladder to the deck.

Hanson, Hines and the two girls were standing amidships peering over the starboard rail.

“You looking for me?” he asked them.

The four turned as one. “Thank God,” Sylvia said. She seemed to mean it. “When you didn’t come up I— that is—we were afraid that—” She stopped talking as she felt the tension and looked slowly from Kelly to Hanson.

Poised on the balls of his feet like a boxer, Hanson was on the alert as he looked from Kelly’s face to the wallet at his waist, then back at his face again. The big Swede seemed almost relieved. “All right, you wise bastard. So now you know.”

Janice started to ask a question but her voice trailed off.

Kelly balanced the knife on the palm of his hand. “I’ll tell you what you want to know. Rara and Kavi are dead. It was Hanson and Hines who cut the sloop loose last night. Then, just to be sure she stayed beached, they chopped a hole in her bottom with an axe.”

Janice found her voice, “Rara and Kavi are dead?”

“That’s right. Hanson killed them the night they went away, as he called it. And one of them fought back. That’s how he got the knife wound. When we found him crawling in the vines, he was probably on his way back from the outer beach after sinking the native canoe and disposing of the bodies.”

Hines wasn’t as drunk as he pretended to be. “You’re balmy in the head, mister,” he jeered. “You can’t prove a blooming thing you’ve said.”

“Not about Rara and Kavi,” Kelly admitted. He touched his wallet. “But I lost this aboard the *Kailua*. Remember? And I can prove the hole in the sloop was chopped from the inside.”

As Kelly moved forward slowly, Hanson backed across the deck and stopped in front of the open door of the cabin. His smile was thin but not forced. He was genuinely amused and deadly in his confidence in his own ability to cope with the situation.

“Okay,” he said, quietly. “As long as you know so much, you might as well know some more. You’re a tough man to deal with, Kelly. I thought I’d scared you off yesterday when I shut down the compressor just long enough

to make your skin crawl. Then when you told me of your determination to dive again if the weather cleared, I didn't dare take a chance. So when you came in and reported that you thought the sloop was dragging her anchor, it gave me a perfect out. Hines and I made damn sure you wouldn't dive again by sailing the *Sally B* down here and chopping a hole in her bottom. We had one hell of a time getting back through the storm. That's what took us so long."

Janice demanded, "But why?"

Hanson stepped inside the cabin briefly. He reappeared gripping the two missing rifles. He tossed one of them to Hines and pointed the other one at Kelly. "This makes a hell of a big hole, sailor. All right. Let's hear that knife ring on the deck."

Kelly slowly and reluctantly allowed the knife to fall.

Janice kept persisting. "I asked you a question, Hanson. What's back of all this?"

Hanson gave her a contemptuous look. "It doesn't make any difference to you. This is one story I'm afraid you're never going to print." His mood became brighter. "Like I was thinking last night, this expedition is going to have some more bad luck. Too bad."

"What do you mean by that?" Kelly asked him.

"Simply this. When the authorities get worried enough to send out a rescue vessel, I'm afraid you and Miss Hart won't be here to see it. In fact, the way I see it, Hines and Sylvia and myself will be the only survivors."

"No," Sylvia shouted. "You can't do that. You promised."

Hanson slapped her hard across the mouth. "And so did you, you slut. And if I were you, I'd stop stalling and make good. Or it may be that Hines and I will be the only survivors."

"Make good on what?" Kelly asked him.

"You ought to know," Hanson said with a leer. "You had the large economy size your first night aboard the *Kailua*."

Chapter 19

FOR A MOMENT no one spoke. Her eyes unnaturally bright, Sylvia held one hand pressed to her slapped face. Janice looked from her to Kelly, then over to Hanson. Kelly shifted his weight from one bare foot to the other as he debated his chances of wrestling a rifle from either Hanson or Hines. He decided they were slim.

“Well?” Hines asked finally. “Why don’t you get it done? I don’t know about you but I ain’t going to feel safe until the blooming bugger is dead.”

Hanson waved him to silence. “We can explain the hole in the hull. We can say Rara and Kavi bashed it in. But I don’t want any blood on deck.”

Janice opened her purse and took out a package of cigarettes. “That sounds sensible to me.” She tried to be nonchalant but it didn’t quite come off.

Hanson pointed his rifle at her, then swung it back to cover Kelly who continued to shift his feet as the deck became hotter and burned his bare skin.

Hines leaned against the rail. “Well, do something,” he cried. “You just going to look them to death or let the bloody sun cook them?”

“I think,” Hanson decided, “we’ll take them back to the island and get rid of Miss Hart and Kelly there, the way I did Rara and Kavi.”

Hines wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “How about Miss Ryan?”

Hanson smiled a thin smile. “I’ll take care of Miss Ryan. I’ take good care of her. And whether she’s still here to watch the rescue vessel put in will depend on how co-operative she is in the next few weeks.” He added, “Not that it matters now, but if you hadn’t bungled that accident in Pago Pago, we could have called the whole thing off back there.”

“Look,” Kelly said. “I still don’t know what this is all about but I do know you can’t get away with wholesale murder. ”

“We can try,” Hanson said.

Janice was horrified, “Then that crate didn’t fall accidentally?”

Hines hooted, “’Ell, no. I did my best to get Kelly, just the way we been trying ever since we left L.A. Now you ’eard what Sven said. Let’s all get in the boat and go back to the island.”

Janice protested, "But you can't just kill us for nothing. What on earth is back of this, anyway?"

"Well, I'll tell you now, Miss Hart," Hines grinned. "It's this way. Me and Sven and a certain other gent got tired of being poor. So—"

Hanson bellowed, "Shut up, you fool. It's none of their business." He motioned with his rifle. "Now get into the boat, all of you." He reached out and caught Sylvia by the wrist. "Unless you want to go into the cabin with me first. You were anxious enough yesterday, to prove what a hot little number you could be when I stopped that compressor."

It was difficult for Kelly to breathe. He was sweating hard. There was something in the safe that Sylvia didn't want brought to the surface. She'd asked him to name his own price not to dive. Still, she'd saved his life the previous day by cheapening herself, by offering herself to Hanson if he would re-start the stopped compressor. She didn't want him to die, that was certain.

Sylvia wrenched her wrist free from Hanson's hand. "Don't touch me."

Hines was amused. "You know, I think you're building up false 'opes, Sven. I think she just give you the come-on."

Hanson scowled at him. "We'll see about that. Now over the side, all of you."

Janice took a deep breath and then exhaled. "You seem to be giving the orders." Her unlighted cigarette bobbed between her lips as she walked toward the rail of the ship with Hanson close behind her. "The condemned may smoke, I presume?"

Hanson was short with her. "I don't give a damn what you do."

The small boat had drifted out the full length of the painter. Hanson reached over the rail with his free hand to pull the boat back within reach and straightened slowly. Janice had taken her small revolver from her purse and was pressing it to the small of his back.

"Good," she said quietly. "Then, from now on I'm giving the orders. Drop your rifle into the water. And don't hesitate too long. You haven't the least idea how much pleasure it would give me to pull the trigger."

Beads of perspiration on Hanson's agonized face glistened in the rising sun as he turned his head and looked at Hines. "Is she holding a gun on me?"

"I'm afraid she is," Hines told him.

Hanson opened his hand and the rifle splashed as it struck the surface, then disappeared into the water.

"You, too, Hines," Janice said.

As Hines hesitated, Hanson said, "For God's sake, do what she says. She means it. She'll blow my backbone in two."

Hines walked to the side of the sloop and dropped his rifle over the rail. "But this ain't regular," he protested. "Newspaper people ain't supposed to go armed."

"That's right," Janice agreed with him. "But," she went on, coldly, "it just so happens that I'm not a newspaperwoman. And Joe Phillips wasn't a cameraman. The underwriters who hired us wanted a pair of unbiased observers to, shall we say, keep an eye on the attempt to salvage the Sea Witch, and as posing as newspaper people was the best angle we could think of, we pulled a few wires and came along as a girl reporter and her cameraman."

Hanson spat over the rail. "I should have known. A goddamn female fink."

"That's right," Janice said. "Civil, criminal and domestic investigations. Any case, anywhere, any time. Of the Phillips-Hart Agency on Pico."

Kelly was even more confused. Janice had used the word underwriters. The word was usually used in connection with insurance. Insurance on what? The Sea Witch or the contents of its safe.

"What do you want me to do?" Kelly asked her.

"I'm trying to decide," Janice said. "Frankly, I'm a little out of my depth. Joe was the brains of the outfit. Up until now, I've just been for window dressing." She thought a moment, and asked, "Can the sloop be made seaworthy enough to get us back to Pago Pago?"

"No."

Janice used her free hand to light a cigarette. "Then it's just so much wood to us. And we can't very well stay cooped up here at this end of the lagoon until someone gets worried enough to send out a rescue vessel. That may be weeks from now. So I guess our best bet is to row back to the island and wait there."

"What about Hanson and Hines?"

"They are a problem. How far is the island from here?"

"I'd say about six miles."

“Could they make it from here to the island along the outer beach?”

Kelly shook his head. “I doubt it. I doubt it very much. There are several gaps in the reef. Besides, they’d cut their feet to ribbons on the coral.”

Janice made her decision. “Good. If that’s the case, we’ll leave them here for the time being. Maroon them, I believe, is the nautical term. Because I doubt if either of them has the guts or the ability to swim six miles,” She motioned to Sylvia. “Go ahead. Get into the boat.”

Sylvia climbed over the rail and down the ladder into the boat.

Janice started to hand the revolver to Kelly and changed her mind. “No. You’d better go next.” She motioned to Hanson and Hines. “And you two walk aft to the rail and stand with your backs turned to me and see how high you can reach.”

As Hanson hesitated, Janice pulled the trigger of her revolver twice and the bullets splintered the deck a few inches from Hanson’s feet. He walked aft and stood as he’d been ordered to stand.

“That’s better,” the girl said. She seemed to be struggling with some inner compulsion. “I don’t know why I don’t just shoot you both and get it over with.”

Hines spoke without turning his head. His thin voice was shrill with fear. ““Ere now, miss. Don’t be ’asty. We ain’t done nothing to you.”

“No?” Janice asked. “There was a man named Joe. Remember?”

She joined Kelly and Sylvia in the boat. Kelly used the knife he’d picked up from the deck to cut the painter and pushed the small boat away from the sloop.

“Keep your eyes on the rail,” he said curtly.

“I intend to,” Janice said.

As Kelly manned the oars, he added, “I still don’t know if we’re wise in leaving them here.”

“No,” Janice answered him, “nor I. But I don’t know what else we can do. If this were a book or a movie we’d have the situation well in hand but when you’re up against the real thing it’s different.”

Kelly asked the question that had been bothering him. “But why? What’s back of all this?”

“Believe it or not,” Janice said. “You still know as much as I do. All I know is there was something about the sinking of the Sea Witch that didn’t

satisfy the underwriters and they offered Joe and me a good deal if we could worm our way into the expedition.”

Sylvia spoke for the first time since they’d left the sloop. “I only wish I’d. known.”

“Known what?” Janice asked.

“That you weren’t a newspaperwoman.”

Kelly started to ask her why and pulled hard on his left oar as the flat crack of a pistol echoed across the lagoon. A second shot followed, then a third.

Janice raised her gun to return the fire and Kelly stopped her. “Have you any more bullets for that revolver?”

“No,” she admitted. “I haven’t.”

“Then you’d better save what you have. I don’t think they’re trying to hit us.”

As if to prove his words, Hanson cupped his hands to his mouth and called, “Have a ball, the three of you. Enjoy yourselves while you can.”

“Like I said,” Janice told them as she looked back at the two men on the deck of the *Sally B*, “up until now I’ve just been for pretty, so I forgot there were also two pistols missing from the gun locker.” Her voice was flat. She talked like she meant it. “I wish now I’d shot the bastards while I had the chance.”

“So do I,” Kelly said. “There’s something else we forgot. And this one is on me.”

“What’s that?” Sylvia asked him.

Kelly told her. “The rafts. There are two rubber life rafts aboard. I remember checking them in. They don’t need to swim six miles. All they have to do is inflate the rafts.” He shifted his grip on the oars. “And there’s another thing.”

“What?”

“The rifles. We should have brought them with us.”

“But they dropped them into the water.”

“In two fathoms. On a hard sand bottom. Even Hines can dive that deep.”

“We seem to have made quite a few mistakes.”

“So it seems.”

Sylvia pressed her hands to her throat, then ran them down over her body as if her skin was suddenly too tight. “In other words, as soon as they

inflate one of the rafts and recover and clean the rifles, we'll have to go through this whole thing again." She looked back over her shoulder at the sloop and a shudder shook her small body. 'And this time we may not be so lucky. I have a feeling we won't be.'

The volcanic soil under the trees was covered with a thick mat of rotted and rotting vegetation on which the sun never shone. Saturated as it was by the rain of the night before, it smelled worse than usual. The evaporation coupled with the heat made just breathing an effort.

Janice sat with her back to the bole of a partially uprooted palm tree as she studied the lagoon. "They don't seem to be in a hurry."

Sylvia said, bitterly, "Why should they be? They have us trapped and they know it."

Kelly studied the girl. Her voice was filled with thinly veiled hysteria. There were deep shadows under her eyes. Her lower lip quivered constantly as her fingers plucked invisible threads from her shorts. She was on the edge of cracking up. God knew she had reason.

He turned his attention to the pitiful collection of weapons he'd been able to gather. He had the knife. He had the steel pinch bar. He'd gathered stones he could throw. Janice had four bullets in her revolver. This against two fully loaded pistols and two high-powered rifles. Unless he could trick Hanson and Hines into close physical combat, he might as well be armed with a child's water gun. He didn't think he could trick them. The chances were that when they did choose to paddle to the island they would shoot him and Janice on sight. He preferred not to think of how they would use Sylvia.

Sylvia said, "You should have shot them when you had the chance."

"So it seems," Janice sighed. "But at the time all I could think of was it was too easy a way for them to die. I wanted them to stand trial. I wanted them to suffer."

"You must have thought a lot of Mr. Phillips."

"Yes," the other girl said. "You see, Joe was my husband."

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry," Sylvia said.

It was as if her swift rush of sympathy had relieved some of her own strain. Her lower lip stopped quivering. She seemed almost resigned.

Janice explained in a hopeless voice, "This was to be the big job. After we got back to Los Angeles, I was just going to stay home and have babies." She ran the back of her hand over her forehead. "But the trouble with us has been that up to now, we've been playing this thing by ear. All with motives of our own. We all knew something was wrong but we didn't know what. We don't know now. All we know is that Hanson and Hines have done everything they could to make the expedition a failure. You don't happen to know why, do you, Sylvia?"

"No," Sylvia said, quietly. "I don't. I know they weren't enthusiastic about joining the expedition but Mr. Harris made them such an attractive offer they couldn't very well refuse."

"But you don't know of any reason why they should want it to be a failure?"

"No, I don't."

"How about you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Would you rather that the safe wasn't recovered?"

Sylvia was silent a long time. "Yes, I think I would," she said finally. "But my reason has nothing to do with Hanson's. I thought he was merely jealous of Matt. I didn't realize how jealous until the afternoon we sailed from Honolulu."

Kelly squatted on the sand beside Sylvia. "It was Hanson who blacked your eye?"

"Yes," Sylvia admitted. "And he said it was just a beginning. He said he'd make sure you never got back to the States if I let you continue on as diver for the expedition. That's why I tried to buy your contract that night in Pago Pago."

"You were trying to prevent any harm happening to me?"

"Yes."

Kelly said, hotly, "Then, instead of turning me away as if I was dirt, instead of trying to buy me off the way you did, why in Christ's name didn't you confide in me and let me beat the bastard to death?"

She looked up into his eyes, then looked away. "Because he said if I kept on seeing you, he'd tell you the truth about me."

Kelly was puzzled. "The truth?"

The corners of Sylvia's mouth turned down. "Yes, the truth. What Mr. Harris and those of the directors who side with him hope to prove if they

can recover the so-called invaluable papers from the safe of the Sea Witch, what a select number of people, including Mr. Harris and Hanson have suspected for some time but have never been able to prove about that wild Ryan girl.”

“What truth is this?” Kelly asked.

Her voice was barely audible, “That along with being the late John Ryan’s stepdaughter, I was also his unwilling mistress ever since the night he forced me when I was twelve years old.”

Chapter 20

THE SILENCE under the trees seemed deeper, the heat even more oppressive. Kelly felt as if his whole body was being squeezed by some irresistible pressure. His chest labored with his breathing. He wanted to hide his face just for being a man.

Her eyes bleak, her voice lifeless, Sylvia continued softly, having trouble in forming the words. “And even that wasn’t the start. It began when I was ten, on the night my mother died.”

Her mouth continued to work but no words came out.

Janice got up from where she was sitting and came over to the log where Sylvia was and put her arm around her. “You poor kid. You’ve never told anyone, have you?”

Sylvia shook her head.

“Then talk,” Janice said gently. She tightened the pressure of her arm. “Get it out of your system, honey. Matt and I will understand.”

Sylvia’s working mouth succeeded in making words. “He—came into my room that night. It was hot. I was frightened and lonely. I couldn’t sleep. And he sat on the edge of the bed and said I was his little girl now, that now I belonged to him. Then he said if I was too warm I should take off my night dress. And I did.”

“Did he undress?”

“No. But all he was wearing was a robe. And it was open and I could see him. Then he stroked me and felt me all over and told me how much he loved me and how happy we were going to be.”

“What happened then?”

“He asked me to put my hand on him.”

“And did you?”

“Yes, I did.”

“And then—?”

“He breathed hard and kissed me on the mouth. Then he said it was a secret between us and if I wouldn’t tell anyone he would buy me a pony in the morning. And he did. And after awhile I forgot all about it. It was like it had happened in a dream. It hadn’t meant anything to me. When I did think

of it I thought maybe it was some sort of a ritual, something all little girls were supposed to do on the night their mothers died.”

“The bastard,” Kelly breathed. “The dirty bastard.”

Sylvia went on, her voice devoid of expression. It was almost as if she were telling of something that had happened to someone else. “Nothing happened after that for two years. I guess he was afraid. Then one night, when I was twelve and it was the servants’ night out, he came into the bathroom while I was in the tub. And just like he’d sat on my bed, he sat on the edge of the tub and told me how pretty I was, how I was filling out and getting to be a regular grown up young lady. And he helped me soap myself and I was embarrassed and I didn’t know what to do. Then he got a glazed look in his eyes and he lifted me out of the tub and he said he was going to prove how much he loved me. And he did. There on the mat in the bathroom, with his hand over my mouth to keep me from crying out when he hurt me.”

Sylvia’s eyes filled with tears and spilled over but her voice hardened and grew cold. “It went on regularly after that at infrequent intervals. And even if no one, had ever told me anything, and no one ever had, I knew it was wrong. But when I’d try to protest he ‘d hit me and tell me if I ever told anyone, the servants or any of my school mates, he’d have me sent away to a school for bad girls.” She wiped her cheeks with the back of her hand. “Then the next morning he’d buy me a whole closetful of new dresses and promise it wouldn’t ever happen again. But it would. The next night. The next week. The next month. Not that it ever meant anything to me. It was just something I had to endure. Then I began to sneak books and read and talk to the other girls at the private school I went to and when I found out how really wrong it was, I said that was enough and tried to get out of the mess by running away with the chauffeur. And that’s how the legend of the wild Ryan girl began.”

Janice tightened her arm around Sylvia’s shoulder. “You poor kid.”

Sylvia asked Kelly if he had a cigarette. He gave her one and lit it. She filled her lungs with smoke and went on. “Even that didn’t solve anything. Johnny was a nice kid. He liked me. I liked him. But we never had a chance. I never even found out what it was like to be with a man, a real man. We were married in Tia Juana and drove directly to Ensenada. But Ryan had detectives following me. And they broke into the motel right after we’d checked in. And Ryan was with them and he was furious. He called

Johnny a fortune hunter and had the detectives heat him up and told him it was lucky he hadn't touched me or he would have had him charged with statutory rape and contributing to the delinquency of a minor. And when I tried to tell the detectives the truth and begged them to take us to court, Ryan told them I was a psychiatric case with a sex psychosis and he had to keep his eyes on me every minute. And the detectives believed him and not me. He had the marriage annulled and took me home and everything went on just as it had before."

Sylvia smoked for a few moments in silence. "Then when I was eighteen I tried again and the same thing happened, only this time he bought the man off. And the newspapers were filled with pictures and stories of the wild Ryan kid who had eloped with a chauffeur when she was sixteen and a phony count two years later. But I was a little older and wiser then. At least so I thought. And when Ryan came to my room that night I told him to get out. I told him if he ever touched me again I'd call in the reporters and tell them the truth about the whole rotten mess."

"What happened then?" Janice asked.

Sylvia looked at her blankly. "He laughed. He laughed at me. You see I'd begun to drink by then, to deliberately pass myself out to keep from thinking. And he showed me pictures he'd taken of me, nude—lewd, filthy pictures he'd taken of both of us while I'd lain sprawled in one of my drunken stupors. And he said he was an old man and he didn't care what I accused him of, his money would buy him out of it. But I was young and just starting life and if I didn't continue to be his mistress he would call in the reporters and show them the pictures and fix it so no decent person would even talk to me again. And I looked at the pictures and knew no one would believe my side of the story. He was the Honorable Mr. Ryan, a white-haired pillar of the church, a civic leader, one of the nation's great industrialists. I was just a drunken little tramp he'd adopted when her mother died. I was the wild Ryan kid with a record of sex psychosis. And I knew what would probably happen. He'd accuse me of seducing him and I'd wind up mopping floors in a psycho ward."

"Get it all out, honey," Janice said. "This has been stored up a long time."

Sylvia dropped her cigarette and watched it die on the wet sand. "It was a few months after that when he got the idea of an around-the-world cruise on the Witch. And I agreed to go along because I thought maybe on

shipboard, living in such close quarters with everyone knowing what everyone else was doing, the old fool would leave me alone. And it worked out that way until we got as far as Sydney. Then he came into my cabin one night when most of the crew were on shore and the whole thing blew up in my face. I couldn't go on. I wouldn't. We had a hell of a fight about it and he told me if I walked out on him he'd not only disgrace me for life he'd cut me out of his will without a penny. And I did what I should have done years before. I told him I didn't care what he did and caught the first plane back to the States. About two weeks later, I heard the yacht had foundered."

More life came into her voice. "When I was told Ryan was dead, that he'd gone down with the yacht, I was happy for the first time since I could remember. It was as if a nightmare had ended. I stopped drinking. I went to parties. I even tried to get my sex life straightened out. I dated a nice boy in our set and let him take me to a plushy hotel. But all it did was disgust me. All I could think of was the night I'd been ten years old, the night my mother died. Then when he said I was his little girl now, that now I belonged to him, I went into the bathroom and was sick. Then I got dressed and went home."

"Go on," Janice said, gently.

Sylvia dabbed at her wet cheeks. "But even then I wasn't out of the mess. The old will that was on file left everything to me, 'to my dearly beloved and obedient daughter, Sylvia Ryan.' Then somehow, from someone, Mr. Harris heard about the fight we'd had in Sydney and some of the details. He must have questioned the servants and one of them talked, although none of them could prove anything. Ryan had seen to that. But because of his financial interest, Mr. Harris was plenty suspicious. And he called me down to the office and said the estate was going to contest the will. He said they thought they could prove that I had exerted improper influence on Mr. Ryan to get him to make the first will in my favor and that the estate had certain information he'd made a new will and they were going to form an expedition to try to salvage Ryan's personal papers from the Witch. Naturally I lied that I had nothing to hide. And I insisted on accompanying the expedition."

"Why?" Janice asked her.

Sylvia told her. "Because I hoped if the pictures were in the safe or if Ryan had made a new will I could get the diver to turn them over to me instead of to Mr. Harris. I felt I had a right to the money. I'd earned it."

Kelly said, "So that's why you came to my stateroom that first night aboard the *Kailua*."

Sylvia was as frank with him as she'd been with Janice. "Yes. I wanted you on my side." She continued to look into his eyes. "But that was only part of the reason. I liked you. I liked you right from the start. You were big. You were young. You were vital. You were everything a man should be." She cried silently. "Then, perhaps because I'd never known anything like it before, known what physical love could mean to a woman, what it was supposed to mean, after you made love to me the first time, I was so madly in love with you that nothing else mattered. For the first time I wasn't ashamed. It was your love that did it. I didn't want anything but you. And I wanted to tell you the whole rotten story but I was afraid if I did you wouldn't even like me any more." She was sobbing now. "Then, before I could get the courage to tell you, I found that damn dead girl in your shower stall] and nothing has been right since." Kelly started to take her in his arms and Janice shook her head. "No, Matt. Let her cry it out. The kid has had a rough time of it. This thing has been building in her for years. Right now I don't imagine she wants you or any other man to touch her."

Sylvia cried for a few moments, then brushed at her cheeks with the backs of her hands. "I'm all right now. The rest of it you know. Everything else I've done since Sven warned me in Honolulu that if I kept on seeing Matt and letting him stay on as our diver he wouldn't live to see Los Angeles again, I've done because I love him, because I wanted him to be safe."

Janice took a handkerchief from her purse and wiped the weeping girl's cheeks. "Easy makes it, honey. What's happened is over and done with. What matters right now is getting out of this mess if we can. I owe that much to Joe. Now the only thing that still bothers me is why Hanson is so determined to see that the safe isn't salvaged. Let's go back to the night Rara and Kavi disappeared."

Sylvia blew her nose. "What about it?"

"You did meet Hanson in the clearing?"

"Yes. Before he went back to the sloop he said it was vitally important that I meet him."

"What did he want?"

"Me," Sylvia said bitterly. "He said he was tired of me playing high and mighty when he knew what I'd been to Mr. Ryan and Matt. I thought he

was going to knock me down and take me right on the ground. But after some juvenile fumbling, similar to what you saw on board the sloop when Matt was on the bottom, he agreed to wait when I promised I would do everything I could to get the two of you to call the whole thing off and go back to Pago Pago. Then after we found Sven wounded everything worked against me. Matt managed to snag the Witch and between you, you maneuvered Sven into a position where he had to let Matt dive or come out in the open. And then—”

“Just a minute, honey,” Kelly stopped her. “We know what’s happened. What we want to know now is why. You said once that Hanson and Hines were reluctant to join the salvage attempt, that Mr. Harris had a difficult time persuading them?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“You also said that right after we were released from Federal custody in Honolulu, Hanson came to your stateroom and struck you and told you if you continued to be friendly with me he’d tell me all about you.”

“Yes, he did.”

“Meaning you and Mr. Ryan?”

Sylvia averted her eyes. “Yes.”

“Then some weeks ago, the night you met him in the clearing, he told you he was tired of you playing high and mighty when he knew what you’d been to me and to Mr. Ryan.”

“What are you trying to prove?”

Kelly told her. “This. He couldn’t help knowing about us. Things happening as they did made it clear to everybody on the *Kailua*. But if Mr. Ryan was as careful as you say, if even the executors couldn’t prove what they suspected, how did Hanson know? Why wouldn’t it be your word against his?”

“Because Hanson has one of the pictures,” Sylvia said. “He showed it to me. One of the pictures that Mr. Ryan always kept either on his person or in his safe as a hold over me. And he—” As she realized the full import of what she was saying her voice ran down like an unwound clock and she clapped the back of one hand to her mouth. “Oh, my God! How could I have been so dumb?”

Kelly sat back on his haunches. And there it was. It had been in front of their noses all the time. He knew why Rara and Kavi had been killed. He knew now why Joe Phillips had died. He knew why Mr. Munson had been

so concerned -with Captain Jack Bellamy's character. He knew who killed May Ambler and why. He even thought he knew the identity of the gray-haired man on the pier.

It was simple. Hanson and Hines couldn't afford to let anyone salvage the safe. There wasn't anything in it. The money and papers it had contained had been gone for two years.

Sylvia stood up and shielded her eyes from the sun as she looked out over the now placid lagoon. "They're coming now," she said quietly. "I can see the raft."

Chapter 21

FROM WHERE Kelly and the two girls lay hidden in the thick tangle of green that fringed the beach, he could see the men's faces. Hines was sodden drunk but seemed able to paddle. Hanson was cold-eyed and alert as his powerful arms helped propel the raft across the water.

Kelly glanced sideways at Sylvia. Her face was wan and pale. Her streaked cheeks and bleak eyes still gave physical evidence of the emotional strain she was under. It seemed incredible that any man could abuse a child and a girl and a woman the way Ryan had abused her. His lips tightened.

There was so much he wanted to tell her. "Look, little darling," he began. "If we get out of this mess—"

Janice stopped him with a sibilant whisper. "Shh, They seem to be getting close enough to hear you."

Kelly returned his attention to the raft. He could see only one rifle. They either had not recovered the other gun or the working parts had been so silted with sand that a hasty cleaning failed to make it usable. It wasn't much. But it was something.

Fifteen yards from the shingle of sand the two men stopped paddling and sat studying the screen of vegetation. Their voices carried clearly.

"They've probably gone inland," Hanson said. "They're probably holed up in one of the caves on the hill. Like the one I stuffed Rara and Kavi into."

Hines took a bottle from the bottom of the raft and uncorked it. "Could be."

"Look. You've had enough of that stuff," Hanson said. "Now put that bottle away or I'll—"

"You'll what?" Hines jeered. "You'll do just what? Shoot me and leave you to face Kelly alone?" He drank from the neck of the bottle and wiped his mouth with his forearm. "Don't give me that bloody guff. You with a rifle in your 'and and 'im with only 'is fists and four shots left in a pop gun and you're more afraid of 'im than I am of you."

Hanson laid down his paddle and picked up the rifle. He fired three shots in quick succession into the shrubs.

"Okay," he called. "This is it. Come and get it, Kelly."

The shots echoed and re-echoed across the lagoon. A flock of sea birds feeding in the shallows rose and wheeled in startled flight. Then the silence closed in again, broken only by the splash of an occasional mullet, leaping from an unseen enemy.

Hanson picked up his paddle and forced the raft ashore with a few powerful strokes. "All right. Let's hit the beach and look for them."

Hines was not enthused. "You 'it the beach and look for them. Remember, Miss Hart still 'as 'er gun. And she 'as no occasion to feel kindly toward me."

Hanson glanced at his partner. "You're drunk."

"Aye," Hines admitted. He dangled his legs over the side of the raft. "But it don't seem to 'elp. It's a pushover, you and Jack told me. We'll be wealthy as nabobs and no one will ever know. Now look at us. Jack's dead. Most of the money is gone. And we're stuck on a bloody piece of coral with our asses 'anging out of our pants, afraid to beat the bush for a bloke of a diver and two girls who can 'ang us."

"Shut up," Hanson said. "Kelly and the girls are probably listening."

Hines stayed on the edge of the raft, dangling his feet in the water. "All right. Stop admiring the blooming scenery and go shut their mouths." He drank again. "Me. I've 'ad a belly full of killing. There ain't no end to it. You've mis'andled this thing from the start."

The heat reflecting from the sand was causing Hanson's own sweat to blind him. He wiped his eyes on the hair on his arm. It helped him to see a little better. "How did I know Jack would show up on the pier and try to put the bite on us? The last time we saw him he was headed for Shanghai."

"Aye," Hines agreed. "But we shouldn't 'ave come in the first place. So Mr. 'arris and the rest of the stuffed shirts got suspicious? They couldn't prove a thing. But no. You 'ad to play it big. You were going to get Miss Ryan alone and show 'er those pictures you took off Ryan to scare 'er into bed with you. Then after you'd 'ad 'er a few times and she found out what a chunk of a man you are, she would be so impressed, so in love with you, that we could move right in. Well, that's the way it 'appened. But not with you." The old man shook his head. "A blooming fortune right there in our mitts. Mr. 'arris would 'ave paid a pretty penny for that packet." Hines laughed drunkenly. "And we didn't dare show it to 'im for fear we'd 'ave to tell 'im 'ow we got it."

Hanson felt of a small bulge in his shirt front. "Shut up and come on. We're still all right. Once I get rid of Kelly and the Hart girl, Sylvia won't dare to talk."

Unsteady and weaving, Hines crossed the rapidly drying sand. "You talk big but you don't produce. Now that you've bashed that 'ole in the sloop, we can't even, as the chaps in the penny dreadfuls say, get away from the scene of the crime." He staggered and fell. The pistol stuck in his belt dropped on the ground. Hines scooped it up and thrust it back in place as he got to his feet. "Blimey, I am drunk."

"Did you get sand in that pistol?"

"I don't know."

"Try it."

Hines pointed the pistol at a tree and pulled the trigger. The bullet in the chamber fired but the slide stuck and the second shot jammed the mechanism.

"You fool, you damn fool," Hanson cursed him. He gave Hines his own pistol. "Now take care of this one. Follow about ten feet behind me and shoot at anything that moves."

"Aye," Hines said, meekly.

They walked up the beach to the foot of the path and stared along it toward the shack. Hanson shaded his eyes with one hand and held his rifle with the other.

It was one of the small things Kelly had gambled on. Everything would depend on surprise. As the two men started up the path, he glanced at Janice, then inclined this head toward Hines. She nodded and leveled her revolver on the old man's mid-section.

Now Hanson was so close he was towering over them. Kelly reached out with both hands and gripped Hanson's bare ankles and yanked and a bullet screamed through the fronds of the low-growing palms at the same time that Janice fired.

Kelly heard Hines cry out. Then Hanson was falling on top of him and they were thrashing in the tangled vines. Hanson was trying to bash in Kelly's face with the butt of his rifle and Kelly caught it and twisted it away. Then he threw it as far as he could while he lay flat on his back. The two men rode each other, smashing hard blows to each other's face and body, first one on top and then the other.

Temporarily on the bottom, Hanson called on Hines to help him.
“Well, don’t just sit there. Come and help me.”

“I can’t,” the old man whimpered, pain sobering him completely,
“Miss ’art’s put a ’ole through my leg.”

The knowledge he was alone gave Hanson added strength. He fought his way to his feet, pulling Kelly up with him as he rose. Then, using a Judo hold, he threw Kelly over his shoulder and against a tree so hard that Kelly was momentarily stunned. He got to his hands and knees and stayed that way, shaking his head and trying to clear his vision.

Then Hanson whirled on Janice and tried to wrest the gun from her hand.

“Give me that revolver, you bitch.”

Janice fired at him and missed. Hanson was on her. He bent her arm at a crazy angle and there was a dull snap as the bone broke. Janice cried out in pain and the gun fell into the weeds. Sylvia scrambled for it and Hanson brutally kicked her out of the way. He stood up, gun in his hand. Then he backed a few feet and stood panting, the revolver leveled on Kelly. His chest rose and fell with his labored breathing.

“It looks like you’ve lost, fellow. There should be three bullets left in this. One for you. One for Miss Hart. And one for Sylvia, when I’ve finished with her.”

Standing behind him, Janice said, quietly, “I wouldn’t pull that trigger if I were you, Hanson. I really don’t think I would.”

There was an indefinable something in her voice. It was pain but it was more than pain. And the hurt wasn’t in her arm.

Hanson looked over his sweaty shoulder. Janice’s right arm was hanging useless at her side, but in her left she was holding a small, businesslike thirty-two automatic pistol.

Hanson swallowed. “Where’d you get that?”

“From my purse,” Janice smiled. “It’s mine. The one you’re holding was Joe’s. Give it to him, will you, Hanson? With all my love.”

Hanson tried to turn to shoot her and was a fraction of a second too late. The first bullet caught him in the small of his back and his arms shot over his head in an involuntary gesture as if they’d been yanked by a powerful string.

Still smiling, Janice shot him again, in the stomach this time. “Tell him I loved him, will you, Hanson? Tell him that I loved him very much.”

Hanson clasped his hands to his middle and fell on his back in the tangle of vines, pleading, "No. For God's sake."

Her smile frozen, Janice closed the few feet between them and stood over his prostrate body as she emptied the clip in her gun.

"Very, very much," she said in a whisper.

The shots resounded across and around the lagoon.

Sylvia helped Kelly to his feet. Her voice was low and worried. "Are you all right? Are you all right, Matt?"

Kelly patted the hand on his arm. "I'm fine." He nodded toward Janice. "Take care of her, will you, honey? Take her up to the shack. She's going to need another woman when she snaps out of this. It seems she thought quite a bit of her guy."

Minutes later he improvised a splint and fitted it to Janice's arm with strips of cloth Sylvia had torn from the bedsheets. The blonde girl bit her lip, but made no sound during the ordeal of the crude first aid.

When he had finished Kelly went back to the beach, stooped over Hanson's body and took a small fish-skin wrapped packet out of the dead man's shirt. Kelly looked from the packet to Hines. "You ever see this before?"

Hines paused in his attempt to bind a crude tourniquet around his wounded thigh. "You're damn bloody well right I 'ave. That's the—" He stopped short and sat looking at Kelly as he realized the unspoken offer that had just been made him.

The packet was proof positive of what he and Hanson and Bellamy had done. But now with Hanson and Bellamy dead, without the packet there was no proof. It was all surmise. True, a good many people had died but even so, with what he had left of the money they'd taken from the safe, he could hire a smart-talking lawyer who might get him off with life. And anything was better than the lethal chamber.

The old man made his decision. "No. Come to think of it, I never did."

"Remember that," Kelly said.

Sylvia was in the lean-to trying to start a fire in the stove with wet twigs. "Here. Let me help," Kelly said.

He ripped the covering from the packet and tore its contents in two, then in four parts, then dropped the parts in the stove and touched a match to them.

“Remember. I didn’t look. I haven’t the least idea what it is. It’s just so much paper to me.”

Sylvia’s voice was small. “Thank you. Thank you with all my heart, Matt.” She wanted desperately to be fair. ‘But—’”

Kelly kissed the tip of her nose. “No buts. The only two who mattered were May Ambler and Joe Phillips. And nothing can bring them back.” He patted her lightly. “Now put some twigs on that fire and make some coffee.”

That night the girls slept restlessly in the hut while Kelly kept watch on the old man outside. The following day was a bad one for them all. Janice and Sylvia chain smoked and Hines drank himself into a stupor to ease the pain of the wound in his leg.

But Kelly’s hunch was that Los Angeles had identified the man on the pier as Jack Bellamy and radioed Munson to get out here quickly. Kelly knew he was right when, toward evening, they heard a roar and saw a small sea plane skimming low over the atoll. It flew the length of the lagoon before banking for a wide turn.

As Kelly had figured, the occupants of the plane were Mr. Munson and a Navy pilot from Pago Pago. The police official was casual about it. “We seem to be a little late. We passed Hanson’s body on the path.”

Kelly kept his voice just as casual. “It’s about time. When did you people find out we might need a hand?”

Munson sat down on the stoop and fanned his face with his hat. “Well, for certain, this morning. You see we’ve been suspicious of the sinking of the Sea Witch for some time. But your saying that man on the pier in Los Angeles had a blue sea serpent tattooed on his hand threw me off. Then I learned from one of my contacts behind the bamboo curtain that Bellamy had been living it up in Shanghai with a blonde tattoo artist two months after he was supposed to be drowned. Of course when he’d blown his roll she shook him. But what was he doing on that pier? Trying to put the bite on Hanson and Hines for more than his third?”

Kelly lighted a limp cigarette. “So I judged from their conversation yesterday.”

“Are you folks all right?”

‘We’re fine. Except Rara and Kavi. They’re dead and Miss Hart has a broken arm.’”

Munson shook his head. "Funny. I mean how things stack up. After you know why they happened. Hanson and Hines and Bellamy deliberately sank the yacht for the hundred thousand dollars in the safe. Then Bellamy spent his share and tried to get more and was stabbed for his pains. And a nice kid from the middle west had to use the washroom at the exact minute the killer left. Then when she didn't have brains enough to tell the police she could identify the party, she had to be gotten rid of and left in your shower stall so you'd be eliminated at the same time. They couldn't kill all the divers in the world or even in the area, but if they could delay the expedition for another year or two, the Witch was almost sure to break up."

"That's for sure," Kelly said.

"Did you get down to her?"

"Once."

"The safe is empty?"

"I don't know. I didn't get into the cabin."

Munson shrugged. "Not that it matters. When they cleaned it the night they sank the Witch, they probably took everything in it." Munson started to get to his feet and sat back as Sylvia came out on the porch carrying two cups of coffee. "How nice. Thank you very much, Miss Ryan."

Kelly pulled Sylvia down on the stoop beside him and sat with his arms around her. There were still details that would have to be cleared up. There were questions that would have to be answered or evaded. But the expedition, as such, was over. The past was as dead as the people who'd died. Only the future mattered.

"There's only one thing," Munson said.

"Yes?" Kelly asked warily.

"It's rather rough on you," Munson said. "I mean, you naturally were banking on your share of the salvage."

Kelly wasn't aware that Janice had come out on the porch and was standing behind them until she spoke. "Oh, I don't know," the blonde girl said. She rested her sound hand lightly on Sylvia's head. "From where I'm standing, I'd say both Matt and Sylvia made out all right. Yes, I'd say they did fine."

THE END
of an Original Gold Medal Novel
by Day Keene